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Week of
October 4, 1943

New York

THEATRE CRITICS'

Reviews

1943

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†*"The Snark Was a Boojum" opened Wednesday, September 1st, at the 48th St. Theatre.*
†*"Blossom Time" opened Saturday, September 4th, at the Ambassador Theatre.*
†*"Laugh Time" opened Wednesday, September 8th, at the Shubert Theatre.*
†*"My Dear Public" opened Thursday, September 9th, at the 46th St. Theatre.*
†*"A New Life" opened Wednesday, September 15th, at the Royale Theatre.*
†*"Bright Lights of 1944" opened Thursday, September 16th, at the Forrest Theatre.*
†*"Land of Fame" opened Tuesday, September 21st, at the Belasco Theatre.*
†*"All for All" opened Wednesday, September 29th, at the Bijou Theatre.*
†*"Hairpin Harmony" opened Friday, October 1st, at the National Theatre.*

THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Theater Critics' Reviews brings you the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELGERAM
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Hairpin Harmony"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 2, 1943

Hairpin Harmony Boring Comedy

Girl Band Looks For Sponsor—But Not in Audience

By BURTON RASCOE

AFTER postponing Hairpin Harmony several times, Harold Orlob committed the grievous error of opening it at the National last night. When You'll See Stars was put on last New Year's Eve, I thought it was impossible for anything cooked up as Broadway entertainment could be worse. I was mistaken. In retrospect, You'll See Stars seems almost bright in comparison with Hairpin Harmony.

Advance notices said the show was concerned with the efforts of an all-girl band to find a radio sponsor. There was a man (Carlyle Blackwell) who came into the hotel room where the girl-band was quartered and sat on a couch for a while and went to sleep (lucky devil!) while the Hairpin Harmonettes, the Clawson Triplets, Teri Keane, Maureen Cannon, Lennie Kent, Karen Conrad and Gil Johnson went through some weak dance and song routines.

If the band was looking for a sponsor in the audience, I am afraid the chances were slim. About half the audience failed to come back after the first intermission. Besides being unbelievably dull, unorganized and tasteless, the show was offensive, for some of the girls of the band were required to say lines implying that they had the morals of alley cats.

The dubious credits for the production go to these: Dora Maugham, staging; Donald Oenslager, setting; Arthur Norris, orchestrations; Mahlue, costumes; Mark Hilliard, supervisor of production. Beside those named, the cast includes: Gay Gaynor, Smiles and Smiles, Irene Corlett, Don Valentine, Ving Merlin, Margaret Irving, David Leonard and Clair Kramer.

'HAIRPIN HARMONY'

Musical farce by Harold Orlob; staged by Dora Maugham; presented by Mr. Orlob at the National Theater Friday, October 1, 1943. The cast:

Bill Heller	Lennie Kent
Howard Swift	Carlyle Blackwell
Chet Warren	Gil Johnson
Reenie Franton	Maureen Cannon
Jackie Stevens	Teri Keane
Evelyn	Karen Conrad
Betty	Gay Gaynor
June, Ruth and Sue	Clawson Triplets (Barbara-Doris-Dorothy)
Cobalt and Looseknit	Smiles & Smiles
Racey Corday	Irene Corlett
Rev. Dr. Brown	Don Valentine
Buddy Roc	Ving Merlin
Mrs. Warren	Margaret Irving
Inspector	David Leonard
State Trooper	Clair Kramer

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
October 2, 1943

Dances, Songs and Slide Trombones Are Featured In Broadway Arrival

By ROBERT GARLAND

AFTER postponements, cast-changings and rewritings, Harold Orlob finally presented Harold Orlob's "Hairpin Harmony" last night at the National Theatre, with libretto by Harold Orlob, lyrics by Harold Orlob and music by Harold Orlob. Harold Orlob wasn't in it, as far as programs say, unless Harold Orlob sang, danced, acted or turned somesaults under another name. At any rate, he is president of the Orlob Productions Company which owns the little thing.

And how that little thing ever managed to reach the Broadway stage, you'll never learn from me. Man and boy, critic and private playgoer, I've been going to the theatre for many a happy year. But, searching through my memory, I just can't seem to find the equal in ineptitude of last night's unfortunate performance. And I'm the professional first-nighter who stuck it out to the very end!

According to the programs, Harold Orlob is more than a wee bit celebrated as the ghost-author of "I Wonder Who Is Kissing Her Now," a pathetic ballad formerly accredited to Joseph Howard, the indestructible, as well as the tunes in "Listen, Lester," and "Yes, Yes, Yvette." It's a pity some good friend of his didn't take him aside and, whispering in his ear, say "Listen, Harold; 'No, No, Hairpin Harmony.'" They would have been doing him—and Broadway—a favor.

* * *

But, worse luck, they didn't! And, because they didn't, "Hairpin Harmony" was exposed last night on the National Theatre's stage. To both the actors, who worked too hard, and the audience, which began to leave too early, it was most embarrassing. There are few things more tolerant, more patient, more well-wishing than a first-night Broadway congregation. But "Hairpin Harmony" even had that congregation down. But I hung on along with the backers and relatives.

What I saw was a group of non-Leonard-Sillman new faces, surrounding old face Carlyle Blackwell, and trying their best to make something out of nothing. Against a familiar setting with Donald Oenslager's name on it, women—and a man or two—acted their hearts out, danced their heels off, blew their brains out (on trumpets and slide trombones) and picked delicately on a harp or a piano.

But not even a "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now" came out of it. And that seems a shame. Instead, we got "What-a-Ya-Say," "I'm Tickled Pink," "Without a Sponsor," "You're The Reason" (with reprise) and "Piccanniny Pie," sung by Smiles and Smiles, a couple of colored performers who are, for my money, the best people in the show. Give them something to do—which Harold Orlob doesn't—and they'll do it.

* * *

All of which is to say that "Hairpin Harmony" manages to live down to its title. And it shouldn't, really! For a stageful of hard working boys and girls does its best to help Harold Orlob, the producer, Harold Orlob, the librettist, Harold Orlob, the lyricist, and Harold Orlob, the composer, not to mention Harold Orlob, president of Orlob Productions, Inc., out of their five-fold dilemma. Trying to make bricks without straw is no new theatrical miracle.

Not even in one of Leonard Sillman's you-never-heard-of-these-people-but-I-like-them revues, have so many would be entertainers worked so hard to entertain you. But, for the most part, they aren't very good and they haven't got a hell of a lot to offer. Maybe all those jokes about a 4F card weren't just fooling.

But, giving credit where credit is supposed to be due, Smiles and Smiles, the two colored entertainers already mentioned, are tops in the mishap at the National. Not that their outstanding number "Piccanniny Pie"—isn't terrible. But they handle it with such skill and assurance, that even the last remaining member of last night's audience found himself applauding . . . Hairpin Harmony" just isn't. Joseph Howard, singing "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now," with cane and ownership, would be a great help around the National.

NEW YORK POST
October 2, 1943

"Hairpin Harmony" Sets a New Low Mark For Musical Shows

By WILELLA WALDORF

IT IS not unusual for Broadway theatrical seasons to start off with a burst of poor plays. Some of the best seasons Broadway has ever had began inauspiciously.

But this particular season opened earlier than usual and the going has been rough for two months now. Ever since the first week in August we have been hoping for something to get genuinely excited about. Here it is October, and we are still waiting.

This is no ordinary season. Broadway appears to be in the midst of a wartime boom. Box-offices all over town are doing a big business. Plays that never would have succeeded in ordinary times are hits. There is talk of an imminent theatre shortage.

And first-night audiences have been taking one of the worst drubbings in history during the past few weeks. The new musical plays have been especially debilitating.

A Girl Orchestra

Last night "Hairpin Harmony" at the National Theatre, instead of giving us cause to perk up, set a new low for the season so far.

Written, composed and produced by Harold Orlob, it is a musical farce about a girl-orchestra looking for a radio sponsor. The orchestra is on stage a good deal of the time, trumpeting and fiddling and blowing clarinettes and the trombones, and there are non-instrumentalists in the cast who mean well.

But it was all so acutely embarrassing that we can't bear to mention anybody's name. The details are printed elsewhere on this page (paper shortage permitting) in small type.

"Hairpin Harmony" is the first show this season that sent us out into the night at the half-way mark. There were two acts listed and when the curtain fell on Act I, there we were in 41st Street headed for home. The mere thought of going back for more was too horrible to contemplate.

Paging Mr. Oenslager

One of the minor mysteries of the production was a note in the program saying that the setting was by Donald Oenslager, one of Broadway's best-known designers until he entered the Army Air Forces over a year ago.

The setting looked a bit dingy and as we sat there contemplating it, in an effort to keep from seeing and hearing what was going on in front of it, the thing began to look too familiar. We're not sure, but we rather think it's the Fifth Avenue mansion Mr. Oenslager designed for a turkey called "Pie in the Sky" nearly two years back.

Broadway seldom brings forth anything as doggedly amateurish as "Hairpin Harmony." Any college dramatic society would be ashamed to own it.

October is here. Winter is coming. Isn't it about time to stop this aimless fooling and turn the theatre back to professionals?

"Hairpin Harmony"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 3, 1943

Black Friday on Broadway

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IT KIND of staggers the imagination to think of the season getting any worse, but last night it did beyond all doubt. I don't know what October will choose to go out as, but it came in like amateur night. For while there may have been one or two shows this season as dull as *Hairpin Harmony*, and one or two almost as silly, there has been nothing even remotely as unprofessional.

Mr. Orlob's little musical about an all-girl band trying to find a radio sponsor, and meantime sprawling all over the living-room of a Mrs. Warren, seems to have been directed by somebody blowing a whistle and then everybody doing whatever he felt like. The more distant sections of the stage were cluttered with lady violinists, lady trumpeters and lady saxophone players who sawed and blew while in the foreground folk sang and danced and frequently spoke lines they must have thought up on the spot. There was also poor Gil Johnson, who, because the prospective sponsor wanted a baby voice on his program, proceeded to imitate one. In fact, he had to squeak at the audience most of the evening.

• • •

Toward the middle of Act II, when the band was as far from finding a sponsor as ever, the plot took a racier turn. An actor who was supposed to represent a cop, but looked more like a trapper, came in and insisted that the musical young ladies were part of a house of ill fame. The ensuing dialogue convinced me that both my morals and my sanity would be best served if I said Aloha to the entertainment. As a matter of fact, most of my confreres had beat it much earlier.

NEW YORK SUN
October 2, 1943

'Hairpin Harmony,' Which Is the Worst Yet, Comes Into the National

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THEY finally got "Hairpin Harmony" onto a New York stage, but it should have been left in Bridgeport. Or Bridgeport should have warned us. It's the worst play I have seen since the high school in Guyton, Ga., put on "St. Elmo." Or was it "Lena Rivers?"

"Hairpin Harmony" has a girl band on the stage—and little else. Maureen Cannon, whose parents hail from the cool green hills of Donegal, is in the cast and she seems to have been on the stage before. The Clawson Triplets are present. So are Lennie Kent, Gil Johnson, Teri Keane, Karen Conrad, Ving Merlin and Carlyle Blackwell, once of the silent screen. I don't believe Pearl White would have been proud of him.

Mr. Orlob, who makes the presentation, is a producer-composer with considerable Broadway experience. He has been doing shows for three decades or so. He had something of a hit in "Listen Lester." Arthur J. Levy, the press agent, is an estimable fellow, known from here to Pikes Peak. The National Theater is an honorable playhouse, housing everything from "Cyrano de Bergerac" (Walter Hampden) to "Grand Hotel." But "Hairpin Harmony" is a mystery.

Also if I haven't said so before, it's pretty terrible.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 2, 1943

Theatrical Fraud

By HOWARD BARNES

THERE must have been worse musical shows presented hereabouts than "Hairpin Harmony," which opened at the National Theater last night. It has been my good fortune to have missed them. Scrabbled together out of big-time radio nonsense, girl bands, and a few routine tap-dances, this is a production to make stay-at-homes glad that they are staying at home. After the vicissitudes which the piece suffered, what with postponements, cast replacements and switching of directors, it was due for a couple of qualifying pats on the back. There will be none from this reviewer.

• • •

For this Harold Orlob offering is all of a piece and it is all awful. The comedy about a fellow with a falsetto voice, who dresses up in diapers to fool a radio sponsor with breakfast foods to sell, is as funny as a crutch. The songs are neither felicitous nor corny, which means that they serve at best as accompaniment to some odd hoofing. The performing is as maladroit as the lines which the poor players are asked to mouth. For a split second last evening, I decided that a buxom female trumpet player might bring some sort of order out of musical comedy chaos. She was lost in the shuffle.

• • •

What more is there to report about "Hairpin Harmony?" Duwico did the lighting. The shoes are by LaRay and the draperies by Weiss & Son. The fixtures are credited to City Knickerbocker, Inc., and Haig and Haig products are used. There are triplets in the show (the Clawsons) and what seems to be a twin team, called Smiles & Smiles, which has the unfortunate assignment of trying to put over a number called "Picanniny Pie."

• • •

The principals in this theatrical fraud are Lennie Kent, Gil Johnson and Maureen Cannon, who are anxious to place a gang of skirted swingsters on the air waves. They are none too good, whether they remember their lines or forget them. There is no question about "Hairpin Harmony." If you see it, you are likely to do your utmost to forget it.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 2, 1943

Orlob's 'Hairpin Harmony' Opens at the National

By JOHN CHAPMAN

A MUSICAL show with plot, lyrics and music by Harold Orlob was presented last night at the National Theatre, 41st St. just west of Seventh Ave. It should not have been presented anywhere, let alone in a good playhouse in the theatre metropolis of the Western Hemisphere.

The title was "Hairpin Harmony." The plot concerned an all-girl band looking for a radio sponsor. One of the lyrics said "I'm a protagonist of a scherzo by Liszt." If there was any music it must have happened after I left, which was early.

There is no sense in embarrassing the singers, actors and musicians involved in "Hairpin Harmony" by mentioning their names, because most of them acted ashamed of themselves on the stage.

It is now Oct. 2, 1943, and about time that the New York theatre pulled itself together and presented some evidence that it is an institution of beauty, wit, inventiveness, thought and respectable tradition.

NEW YORK TIMES
October 2, 1943

Erratum

By LEWIS NICHOLS

NO DOUBT there are many words which might better describe "Hairpin Harmony," which opened last evening at the National, but in a tight Saturday morning paper dreadful will do. For Harold Orlob's musical farce about the efforts of a leader of a girl band to find a radio sponsor is witless, vulgar, inept and tasteless. A group of players, mainly young and earnest, go through the motions of a performance, but the book is so dreary they cannot even start fairly. Maureen Cannon, the leading lady, has a charm that is out of place in the proceedings, and a girl band plays the music much better than it probably deserves. A good many of the first nighters did not linger.

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Critics'
THEATRE REVIEWS

"All for All"

NEW YORK SUN
September 30, 1943

'All for All,' Raucous and Inept Farce, Reopens The Bijou Theatre

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE tidy bandbox of a playhouse called the Bijou, in disuse and darkness for the past few seasons, came back into the theatrical business last evening with a gauche and rowdy little farce called "All for All." I can recall nothing within the Bijou's twenty-six years' existence that has been more inept.

"All for All," in a previous incarnation, was known as "Give and Take," written by the late Aaron Hoffman, and Broadway saw it two decades ago. Now, frantically slapstick and of vague authorship, it comes forth as a farce of capital and labor issues and concerned specifically with the establishment of an "industrial democracy" in a California fruit cannery.

There is only one set and there are but six players, and they shout at each other through three acts. Jack Pearl, who has been a funny fellow on the stage and on the radio, is again his panting, explosive and spluttering self. Harry Green joins in the clamor and by their violence and gurgling incoherence they got roars of laughter from some of last night's customers. But the team of Pearl & Green can't make a play—certainly not this one.

A. L. Berman, attorney, and specialist in matters theatrical, presents "All for All." He has provided a nice set in the executive office, designed by A. A. Ostrander. He engaged an attractive and unusually competent young actress in Flora Campbell for the only girl of the piece. I forgive her this current misstep.

If there are any honors to be passed around they go, actually, to the Bijou itself. This theater was opened back in the spring of 1917 with Eugene Walter's melodrama, "The Knife," and it housed dramatic fare in great variety, ranging from Owen Davis's "The Detour" to Helen Hayes in "What Every Woman Knows." And now brightened from top to bottom the Bijou, after years of slumber, returns to the living.

I wish Mr. Berman luck upon his emergence as a producer and the renovated Bijou the same with "All for All." Both will need it.

Broadway's drama famine continues.

'ALL FOR ALL'

Play in three acts by Norman Bruce, based on "Give and Take," by Aaron Hoffman; staged by Harry Green, setting by A. A. Ostrander; presented by A. L. Berman at the Bijou Theater, Wednesday evening, September 29, 1943. The cast:

Marion Kruger	Flora Campbell
John Bauer, Jr.	Lyle Bettger
Albert Kruger	Harry Green
John Bauer, Sr.	Jack Pearl
Daniel Drum	Wyrley Birch
Thomas W. Craig	Loring Smith

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
September 30, 1943

Capital and Labor Both Lose

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE Bijou was used as a legitimate theater last night for the first time in 10 years, and a lot of gags were used for the first time in 20. Based on a play that ran in the early 20s, *All For All*—despite its topical subject-matter—more than retains its period flavor. On the topical side, it can be described as a harmless spoof of capital and labor sharing control of a factory—say the Jack & Heintz plant. But there is no reason to be unduly sociological about it. The whole thing is much less capital and labor than just Potash and Perlmutter—or rather, Potash and Perlmutter without their sophistication. (After all, the class struggle is represented by Jack Pearl and Harry Green.)

• • •

Part of the plot (part will do amply) runs this way. Jack Pearl is an explosive boss whose social-minded son talks the factory hands into demanding half of the business. Mr. Pearl explodes, first at the idea, again when he finds that his beloved foreman, Mr. Green, has become the workers' spokesman. But Mr. Pearl gives in—the business is on its last legs anyway, and the predatory town banker is all set for the kill. But between the workers and a slightly daft millionaire, the banker is foiled and the cooperative system triumphs.

• • •

It's all treated very restfully, with capital and labor composing their differences just about the way the families of Abie and his Irish Rose once did. The play spoofs both sides impartially; after all, it's really only interested in getting laughs.

The laughs, however, are not easy to get. Most of the goings-on would make the funny papers blush. Most of the jokes are much older than I am (one of them is usually ascribed to Dumas *pere*) and few of them had much of a bouquet to start with. To speak of the chief personages as caricatures would be to malign an honorable art; let's just call them Jack Pearl and Harry Green in a tough spot. They do their best, and Green, at times, is actually amusing. But *All For All* is just an epic of simple-mindedness and bad jokes.

NEW YORK POST
September 30, 1943

Jack Pearl and Harry Green Team Up in "All for All"

By WILELLA WALDORF

JACK PEARL AND HARRY GREEN are both funny fellows and the idea of turning them into a comedy team is a good one. We could wish, however, that A. L. Berman had been able to find a better vehicle for them than "All for All," produced at the Bijou last night.

According to the program, "All for All," by Norman Bruce, is based on a play by Aaron Hoffman. The Aaron Hoffman work was "Give and Take," originally presented on Broadway twenty years ago, with George Sidney and Louis Mann in the principal roles. "Norman Bruce" is said to be a pseudonym for several people who had a hand in trying to bring it up to date.

A variation of the old "Friendly Enemies" formula, "All for All" concerns two old pals, John Bauer, Sr., owner of a California fruit canning works, and his loyal foreman, Albert Kruger. With the arrival of John Bauer, Jr., home from college with democratic ideas for freeing his father's wage slaves, Kruger becomes spokesman for the men against capitalistic oppression as represented by Bauer, Sr. Their old friendship is at an end.

It develops that the plant is in a precarious financial condition, and actually lost $75,000 during the past fiscal year. Kruger demands the right of the employees to share in the deficit.

Long Vaudeville Skit

"All for All," despite the efforts of its small but energetic cast, seems more like a long drawn out vaudeville skit than a play. The spectacle of the two erstwhile pals threatening each other with hammers and telephones becomes pretty tiresome as time goes on and the puns and feebie jokes tossed back and forth are seldom overly bright.

The effort to bring things up to date by inserting references to wartime rationing, food for the Army camps, and the draft only seemed to make it sound older than ever. Pearl and Green are both comic now and then in their best vaudeville manner, but the effort to make the play last for the regulation three acts put them under a severe strain.

Lyle Bettger and Flora Campbell as the son of the industrialist and the daughter of the foreman who becomes Secretary of State in the new democratic setup, were pleasant enough, and Wyrley Birch and Loring Smith filled out the small company.

A. A. Ostrander's setting featured a view of wheels turning without, plus some toy-shop effects with lights and streams of tiny trucks moving jerkily in the distance.

There seemed to be a number of playgoers in last night's audience who found "All for All" quite funny. On the other hand, several people in our vicinity were sound asleep. It all depends on how this sort of thing affects you. This reviewer was on the drowsy side.

The little Bijou Theatre, by the way, rejoined the ranks of Broadway's legitimate theatres last night after a lapse of something like seven years. Brightly refurbished and comfortably intimate, it should be of some help during the current Broadway theatre shortage.

"All for All"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
September 30, 1943

'All for All' a Model T Wheeze in a Bright New Playhouse

By JOHN CHAPMAN

SO far as the legitimate stage as an institution is concerned, the only constructive result of last night's presentation of "All for All" is the reopening of the Bijou Theatre. This intimate playhouse on 45th St., dark for seven years, has been brightly and tastefully refurbished and is a pleasant place to sit in. I predict a long run for it.

Maybe "All for All" will have a long run, too. There is no way of telling in these cockeyed times. All I can tell you is that it seems like the granddaddy of all formula comedies and contributes nothing whatever to the advancement of the drama. It is strictly Potash-Perlmutter, Mutt-Jeff, Mike-Ike, with Jack Pearl and Harry Green playing the characters.

Let's Catch a Movie

The comedy is by an unstated number of anonymous people pseudo-named Norman Bruce, and it is a modernization of a play by Aaron Hoffman which was produced in 1923 under the title of "Give and Take." The only noticeable difference between now and twenty years ago is reference to current conditions, like the war and rationing and Roosevelt.

If you accept "All for All" at face value it isn't bad; it's just that the face value is from a different age. Mr. Pearl and Mr. Green are highly amiable German-Jewish comedians, and their squabbles, gestures and sputterings provide a kind of humor which needs no change. Jack owns a canning factory; Harry is a foreman—and they get into a capitol-labor dispute. Jack has a son, Harry a daughter, and it's like "Abie's Irish Rose."

Plot 20 Years Old

Flora Campbell and Lyle Bettger play the boy and girl whenever they are needed, which isn't often. Loring Smith invests the role of a maniacal millionaire with gusto, noise and not a little fun. Wyrley Birch is a storybook banker who holds the mortgage on the factory. Harry Green's direction keeps the contraption moving pretty fast, considering it's a 1923 model.

As I say, "All for All" might have a long run in these cockeyed times, but if it does it won't advance the so-called art of the stage one damned bit. Hasn't ANYBODY got a new play? Or do we have to go to a movie when we want to see somebody trying to do something new?

NEW YORK TIMES
September 30, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"All For All"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

PROBABLY there is nothing to be gained by looking a farce in the mouth, especially if in addition to age you find there Jack Pearl and Harry Green. That they could be a remarkably funny pair seemed certain through part of last evening's "All For All," but it also seemed definite that the play in which each is returning after quite a long absence from Broadway is not the best play—even for farce—in the land. Contracted, it would be a fine short sketch, assuming the Messrs. Pearl and Green would remain to paly it, but stretched out over an entire evening it wears pretty thin. There are long stretches when Jack and Harry aren't doing anything, a fatal situation into which to place them.

• • •

"All for All" is based on the old Aaron Hoffman play, and it has been revised for this season by a person or persons hiding behind the name of Norman Bruce, with A. L. Berman, Broadway's lawyer and the play's producer, to protect them. It is a farce about capital and labor, and how the workers in a factory formed an Industrial Democracy to help run the plant. Since it is a farce and the basic joke runs out near the end of the second act, there also is a crazy man who dashes to the rescue in time to prevent utter chaos and to see that the girl, who has been standing waiting, marries the boy. The song is not young.

But Mr. Pearl and Mr. Green, when their material is fresh and before the situations become wearisome, are all on the side of laughter. Mr. Pearl is still the accent of Hester Street, a table-pounder and a grabber for the telephone, the hammer or his own breaking heart. Mr. Green, as the spokesman for Industrial Democracy, is fat and slow, his mind is anxious to follow what is going on, but it is never quite certain and doesn't know where next to lead the body. During their good moments of comedy and burlesque, the pair are as funny as anything in town, but unfortunately Mr. Pearl not always is falling wounded in his chair, nor Mr. Green, dead-pan, is reading out a declaration.

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Probably the difficulty with "All for All" is that not enough goes on, and the Pearl walls of anguish, cannot disguise that fact for a whole evening. In musical shows, where Jack and his colleague could come on and off, they could travel with a breakneck speed which in a whole evening of the legitimate would kill them; and so, too often, the authors let them rest, which is bad. The other characters are played by Flora Campbell as the girl, Lyle Bettger as the boy, Wyrley Birch, who makes a good comic banker, and Loring Smith, the ex-insane mode of salvation. If the other players had just stayed in a corner silently reading the plot to themselves while the masters worked, the evening might somehow have been better.

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"All for All"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
September 30, 1943

All for All Needs All It Has—and More— To Be a Good Show

By BURTON RASCOE

ALL FOR ALL, which opened at the cozy and newly refurbished Bijou Theater last night, contains the material for a good one-act vaudeville sketch that has been incontinently stretched out to last for three acts. If it had had more body and (as the late George M. Cohan used to term it) more gravy, it might easily have been another success on the Potash & Perlmutter order. As it is, I doubt that the heroic and admirable efforts of those two amusing and appealing comedians, Jack Pearl and Harry Green, will attract enough of patronage to keep the show alive for long.

There is little more to be said about All for All than that. I didn't see the play, Give and Take, by Aaron Hoffman, on which Norman Bruce based last night's offering, and I know nothing about it except that it ran for 176 performances back in 1923. But if Give and Take lasted that long it must have had more to it than the comic exchange of insults between two friendly enemies, which was the only attraction of last night's entertainment.

Dull Without Pearl

The idea of the skit is a hardy perennial and rather brightly treated in spots, but the moment the Messrs. Pearl and Green are out of the dialogue the interest sags, and those moments occurred so frequently that people began to absent themselves from the proceedings after the first act, and at the opening of the third act about a third of the house was empty. The laughter was light and intermittent. I got only two slight chuckles out of the evening; but that is not a criticism, for the Messrs. Pearl and Green are humorous entertainers rather than laugh-provokers. Theirs are highly stylized characterizations—one portraying a short-tempered bedeviled smart fellow and the other portraying a beguiling fathead.

The plot has to do with the introduction into Bauer's canning factory of the new social-democratic theories about the relationship between capital and labor which Bauer, Jr., has absorbed in college. The foreman, Albert Kruger, has been associated with the elder Bauer for 30 years, since the days they peddled vegetables together with a horse and cart. Young Bauer has explained his theories to the workmen in secret meetings and they adopt a constitution which is to affect the reorganization of the company, giving the workers a share in the management and 50 per cent of the profits of the enterprise. They elect Kruger their spokesman, their "Lincoln," to present their plan to Bauer for adoption under threat of strike.

Plot of the Play

The company has been running at a $75,000-a-year deficit, and not only are there no profits to share, but there is a note for $150,000 coming due, which the bank, under pressure from a cannery competitor, refuses to renew. Bauer capitulates to his son and foreman and prepares to lose everything and start all over again, when he is duped into signing a contract for the delivery of huge orders of canned goods by a man who has just escaped from a booby-hatch. The lunatic has read about the conversion of the plant into a new capital-labor democracy and, having a scheme of his own to eliminate the grocer and middleman, he believes he and Bauer are kindred spirits.

If that engages your interest I shall not spoil it for you by betraying the means by which the author gives the skit a quick wash-up just before the final curtain. But you may get a giggle when I tell you that Mr. Bruce makes Mr. Pearl go serious for a minute or two, just long enough to make it gravely clear that his message is a profound one, namely that young Bauer's theories and the theories of the escaped lunatic are right in line with Mr. Roosevelt's and these ideas will be the working actualities of the near future.

Romance Falters

There is a faint attempt to work in a love interest between the comic exchanges of Mr. Pearl and Mr. Green—Lyle Bettger as the son of Mr. Pearl and Flora Campbell as the daughter of Mr. Green carrying the burden so falteringly that some unromantic persons in the audience (of which unfeeling crew I must shamefacedly confess myself one) sniggered at their plight. Loring Smith was a right proper lunatic for a vaudeville skit and Wyrley Birch a right proper banker for burlesque. All four were mere fill-ins for the comedy team of Pearl and Green, whose material was inflated to the point of bankruptcy.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
September 30, 1943

"Nothing for Nothing"

By HOWARD BARNES

THE problems of Capital and Labor are solved with vaudeville flourishes at the Bijou. In "All for All" Jack Pearl and Harry Green are reviving a decrepit social comedy about the Boss, the Worker and that inevitable villain, the Banker. The stars are in there working overtime to streamline a bit of theatrical shoddy. Their antics are sometimes laughable, but they have next to nothing to do with the play at point. The latter is as lamentable as it must surely have been in its first presentation, circa 1923.

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Norman Bruce, whatever that pseudonym stands for, seems to have thought that the time was ripe for a nice, tolerant farce about the fellow in the white collar and the guy in dungarees. Thumbing through the archives, he found this dramatic mishap by Aaron Hoffman. He was not right about the timeliness of its subject matter. He was all wrong in the manner of refurbishing the relic. For "All for All" is dull when it is not embarrassing; definitely dreadful when it tries to make the few social points which must have intrigued the author.

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Those points only deserve passing mention. There is a big industrialist, of course, who runs a cannery in California, but is being given the squeeze play by the local banker. There is his good friend among the hired help who is incited to rebellion by radical notions and then comes to his rescue when he is about to be forced out of business. There is a romance, involving the son of the boss and the daughter of the foreman. All in all, "All For All" has a more corny plot than even Hollywood would dare to perpetrate on its patient patrons.

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Pearl and Green do what they can with this subject matter. Baron Munchausen leans over backward to sustain a comparatively plausible burlesque character. Green takes greater advantage of scenes which are supposed to be funny, but he is acceptable enough as the foreman of the canning factory. The others in the cast, particularly Flora Campbell and Lyle Bettger in the dislocated love story, are generally bewildered by the goings-on at the Bijou. "All For All" could never have been very good. It is genuinely bad in this resurrection.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
September 30, 1943

'All for All' Opens At Bijou Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

AN ODD number called "All For All" last night relighted the Bijou Theatre. In the last six or seven years, most of us had forgotten what an attractive playhouse the Bijou is, small, as the name implies, and warm and cheerful, an ideal setting for an intimate revue or a quiet comedy. But "All For All" is not an intimate revue. Nor is it a quiet comedy. Instead, it is filled with sound and fury, signifying next to nothing.

According to the program, "All For All" was originally a play by Aaron Hoffman. Then, if reading is believing, one Norman Bruce did it over. Having been done over, A. L. Berman snapped it up as a co-starring vehicle for Jack Pearl and Harry Green.

I wish I could assure you that "All For All" is worthy of the rejuvenated playhouse in which it is housed. But I just can't do it! In three wordy acts, and a single setting by A. A. Ostrander, the play by Norman Bruce out of Aaron Hoffman tries good and hard. But very little comes of its trying. Even when projected at the top of everybody's voice, "All For All" remains a pallid reprint of "Potash and Perlmutter."

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It would seem that, out California way where anything can happen, John Bauer owns a canning factory. He also owns a son who, fresh from college, returns to set up an Industrial Democracy among his father's employees. This Industrial Democracy is founded firmly on the New Deal, which gives you some idea. At the head of it is a former foreman whom the workers call a Lincoln. Mr. Bauer's enslaved employees are to be freed!

Not that they want to be freed. Their hours are normal. Their treatment is considerate. Their pay is excellent. But Mr. Bauer's offspring thinks otherwise. So, behind his father's back, he organizes his dear old dad's workmen against him.

Needless to relate, the installation of Industrial Democracy as good as wrecks the plant in which Bauer's K. O. Brand of canned goods has originated for the past 30 years. And it also as good as wrecks a remarkably tepid love affair between the boss's son and the foreman's daughter. But, in the end, everything is straightened out by an escaped lunatic. At the moment, it seems like a good idea!

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All this and not much more is played by Jack Pearl, Harry Green and four others at the tops of their voices. Mr. Pearl, a graduate from several "Passing Shows" and a couple of "Artist and Models," and the originator of the radio's Baron Munchausen, deals with Papa Bauer in the only way Papa Bauer could possibly be dealt with. If Papa Bauer isn't good and loud, Papa Bauer isn't good at anything.

Harry Green, who seems to have been the David Warfield of the London stage, also does what he can with Albert Kruger, the Perlmutter to Mr. Pearl's Potash—or maybe it's the other way around. Anyway, they play Potash-and-Perlmutterly into each other's faces.

Flora Campbell, whom I first saw with Eva Le Gallienne in her gone-but-not-forgotten repertory company down in 14th st., is an attractive daughter of the social minded foreman. Lyle Bettger years a glittering pompadour as John Bauer, Jr., and makes languid love to Miss Campbell whenever the script allows. The other two are all right as a great big lunatic and a mean old banker . . . I wouldn't be surprised if "All For All" were all for nothing. But the rejuvenated Bijou Theatre is most attractive.

"Land of Fame"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
September 22, 1943

Lots of Purpose But No Punch

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE season's first war play has its moments, but by no means enough of them. Too many things have conspired against *Land of Fame* to give it either sufficient drama or sufficient meaning. To their story of Greek guerrilla fighters holding out against their Nazi conquerors Albert and Mary Bein have brought a certain purposefulness, but little of the power that would make it count. Once again the portrayal of heroism, once again the depiction of villainy are reduced to pretty stock terms, carried through with undue theatricalism, and overlaid with familiar rather than fiery words.

To begin with, the authors, harassed by the necessities of plot, have fallen back on a tritely melodramatic one. Slow in starting, so that the first act is exceedingly dull, it develops into a matching of wits between the rebels and the Nazis, with the guerrilla leader seeming to betray his cause in order to save it, and then being snatched from the gallows in a Marines-to-the-rescue finish. The staginess of the plot spoils the play's chances as realism without quite enhancing them as melodrama; like so many other war plays, *Land of Fame* is fatally squeezed between what it would like to say and what it is forced to do.

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Nor is there a freshness about the characters to redeem the familiarity of the plot. The Nazis, in particular, are unimpressive; not only are they indifferently characterized, but they lose what little force they have from resembling the Nazis in all the other plays of the last few years. The authors have lavished most of their care on a Nazi archaeologist who has sold his soul to save his skin and who bitterly repents of the bargain. But his big scene is only grazed by intensity, and at length destroyed with words. For words, too, work against the Beins. Here and there they have written a good scene or contrived an effective speech, but most of their dialogue lacks thrust and impact, and too many of their set speeches confuse stridency with eloquence.

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What has finally conspired against the play is the general level of the acting. With a first-rate production *Land of Fame* might have overridden its faults; as it is, a number of wretched performances have served to highlight them. Norman Rose gets a certain crude force into the role of the guerrilla leader, and Stefan Schnable has some effective moments as the unhappy Nazi. But Beatrice Straight is completely off-key as the guerrilla leader's sweetheart—an important role; and Beatrice de Neergaard makes the badly written part of an old Greek matriarch only seem worse. Most of the minor Nazi figures are wholly ineffective, and so are most of the guerrilla fighters.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
September 22, 1943

Melodrama Action Centers on Greek Guerrilla Band's Fight

By ROBERT GARLAND

NOT quite enough of the glory that is Greece has managed to find its way into the melodrama which arrived last night at the Belasco Theatre. Dramatized by Albert and Mary Bein from an original story by Charles Paver and Mr. Bein, "Land of Fame" sets out to show how the heroic Greeks fight on, hiding in the hills, swooping down night after night to harass the invaders. The action takes place in the Summer of 1942.

The piece's main harassing has to do with the blowing up of a bridge by a band of Greek guerillas. This sabotage is accomplished after three acts and 10 scenes, most of which are laid either up on a mountain top or in German Staff Headquarters down in the town below.

It seems to me that the action of the play which Albert and Mary Bein have written is considerably retarded by the constant shifting of locale. No sooner does "Land of Fame" get good and going than out go the lights, around goes the stage, up go the lights, and another episode is under way. This makes a jumpy and none too understandable play even more jumpy and less understandable than it might be were the locale not so changeable.

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As far as I know, "Land of Fame" has to do with a band of Greek guerillas under the leadership of one Peter Melinas. Hiding in the hills by day, committing sabotage by night, Peter and his little band manage to get in the hair of the Nazis stationed in the town below. Especially in the hair of General von Obermann and his fellow officers who, among other things, torture a shepherd boy and mistreat Peter Melinas' fiancee in an effort to learn his whereabouts.

Into this narrative—which constantly reminds me of "The Moon Is Down"—is injected a simple love story between Peter Melinas, already mentioned, and Angela, the fiancee who is mistreated by the Nazis. But even this simple love story comes to no good end.

There isn't a great deal more to tell you save that there is a member of the Gestapo who also manages to get in the hair of General von Obermann and the others—a member of the Gestapo who keeps a wary eye on the German General Staff when he isn't quoting Byron or betraying the Nazis when nobody but Peter Melinas is listening. To my way of thinking, he is the most credible person in the entire play. You actually believe in him.

Although it is difficult to be certain, I am pretty sure it is Stefan Schnabel who plays the Byron-quoting, double-crossing Gestapo with skill and believability. Last seen on Broadway in "Glamour Preferred" and a graduate of Orson Welles' ill-fated Mercury Theatre, he is the son of Arthur Schnabel, the concert pianist. He is also an actor who will bear watching. Last night, I was sorry to see him die at the playwrights' hands.

Norman Rose brings no little power and a beautiful speaking voice to the role of Peter Melinas, the good guerilla. But, as it is written, the role seldom quite comes to life. Mr. Rose gives it his stalwart best, but only on occasions does he manage to make it three dimensional.

The others are in the picture, especially Beatrice de Neergaard as Kyra Maria, an old peasant woman; Kenneth Le Roy as Steve, a shepherd boy, and Whitford Kane, as the Wagon-Maker of Mandra. The settings, by Frederick Fox, who is co-producer with Albert Bein, are effective, especially the mountain top known as The Shepherd's Stone . . . Sincerely timely and meaningful, it is in me to wish that "Land of Fame" were clearer and more credible.

NEW YORK POST
September 22, 1943

'Land of Fame' a Drama Of Nazi-Occupied Greece

By WILELLA WALDORF

NAZI invasion tactics have followed the same brutal formula in conquered country after conquered country. After ruthlessly seizing everything in sight and, if possible, setting up a panel of Quislings to help keep order, the invaders have been opposed at every turn by freedom-loving peoples who refuse to be conquered even though their armies have surrendered.

The ceaseless guerrilla warfare that goes on all over Europe, the exploits of the many underground movements against Hitler and his hordes sound like the stuff stirring drama is made of.

Unfortunately, the very fact that Nazi methods are always the same keeps the dramatists pounding along over what is now very familiar ground.

The valiant struggle of the Greeks against their oppressors deserves round after round of applause, but "Land of Fame," the new play by Albert and Mary Bein presented last night at the Belasco Theatre, suffers from the fact that Broadway has already seen pretty much the same plot acted out against other backgrounds.

Norway—and Greece

There are scenes in Mr. and Mrs. Bein's play, particularly toward the end, that are more effective than anything in John Steinbeck's "The Moon Is Down," which told a similar tale of heroism in conquered Norway. But the sad fact is that neither Mr. Steinbeck nor the Beins have been able to make the Norwegian or the Greek patriots seem half as real or as impressive on the stage as a good newspaper story does in half a column of type.

"Land of Fame" has its Nazi headquarters in the Greek village of Talom, which happens to be the home town of Peter Melinas, ex-lieutenant-colonel of the Greek Army, now leader of guerrilla warfare in the district.

The Nazi officers include a shrewd bully of a general, a nerve-wracked colonel worrying about his family being bombed in Essen, an elegant, blond, machine-minded tank-corps captain, and a Gestapo lieutenant once an archeologist, who not only appreciates the glory that was Greece, but finally gets around to quoting Byron and tossing in his lot with the guerrillas, only to discover that they won't have him on any terms.

The cynical, disillusioned Gestapo officer is the most effectively written role in the play, and it is acted for all it is worth by Stefan Schnabel. Ed Begley, Hunter Gardner and Peter von Zerneck do what they can to uphold Der Fuehrer as the other officers, while Norman Rose, Whitford Kane, Beatrice Straight, Jack W. Bittner and Royal Dana Tracy lead the guerrillas with spirit and fortitude.

The Familiar Story

"Land of Fame" starts lamely and seems intensely theatrical most of the way, though it does pick up interest in the second act and goes in for some rip-roaring melodrama and wholesale shooting in the third. But we were constantly haunted by the ghosts of all the other melodramas we have seen on the same general theme. The Beins simply haven't written a play brilliant enough to rise above the general monotony of the routine anti-Nazi plays that have gone before.

Frederick Fox's scenery is simple, effective and quickly shifted. It is a tasteful production. Theatre-goers who have not already been over-fed on Hitler-invasion melodramas, or those who find in the plight of war-torn Greece a particularly strong emotional appeal, will doubtless discover much to interest them in "Land of Fame." It has the virtue of getting better as it goes on.

"Land of Fame"

NEW YORK SUN
September 22, 1943

'Land of Fame,' Play of Nazis in Greece, Comes Into Belasco Theater

By WARD MOREHOUSE

ALBERT BEIN, taking on the triple headache of co-author, co-producer and stage director, now gives Broadway still another drama with the message that the spirit of the people of a war-ravaged land can never be broken. He calls his play "Land of Fame." It is fumbling and cluttered and I see scant hope for it.

Mr. Bein displayed considerable imagination and proficiency in characterization and dialogue in "Little Ol' Boy," which introduced that tough redhead, Burgess Meredith, to the New York stage. He had affecting moments in "Heavenly Express." But whatever excitement there is in "Land of Fame" comes through physical violence and not through the writing, or believability of characters or locale.

"Land of Fame" is a play of Greece under Nazi invasion. Mr. Bein writes of the pillaging and prostration of that heroic country during the summer of 1942. He pictures the resistance of a guerrilla band hiding out in the mountains, the attempts to lead the Nazis into a death trap, the slaughter and the torture of civilians, the heroism of individuals, the unnerving of occupying enemy officers, and of the vengeance and reprisal of the guerrillas in a nick-o'-time finish. It is a shooting and whooping closing that helps the cause of the patriots, and it saves the hostages of the village of Talom—but it doesn't help the play.

"Land of Fame," as done last evening in its first public performance at the revered Belasco, is empty and inexpert. And the acting is also on the dubious side. Norman Rose brings force of delivery to the role of the leader of the guerrilla camp; Ed Begley has drive as the Nazi general; Beatrice de Neergaard is effective as a rotting old woman, the most fiery patriot of them all. Whitford Kane, who has been with us in no end of plays—many of them good ones—is now an old wagon maker turned Greek warrior, and he plays the part with a beard and only a touch of an Irish brogue. Beatrice Straight has a trying role and does little with it.

Mr. Bein's play—his play written in collaboration with his wife—is in the tradition of others Broadway has seen concerning Nazi-occupied lands—"Men in Shadow," "The Barber Had Two Sons" and "The Moon Is Down," which was by far the best. "Land of Fame" now reaches a Broadway stage after Mr. Bein worked many months to get it there. He makes the production with Frederick Fox, the busy and talented scenic designer, as his associate.

"Land of Fame" is written with great sincerity, but with no distinction. I doubt its chances.

'LAND OF FAME'

a play in three acts and ten scenes, by Albert and Mary Bein, based on an original story by Charles Paver and Mr. Bein. Staged by Mr. Bein; scenery by Frederick Fox; music by Joseph Wood; costumes by Grace Houston; production supervised by J. B. Daniels; presented by Mr. Bein and Mr. Fox. At the Belasco Theatre, Tuesday, September 21, 1943. The cast:

Steve	Kenneth Le Roy
Angela	Beatrice Straight
Sergeant Hauptmann	Richard Basehart
Colonel Reinicke	Hunter Gardner
Kyra Maria	Beatrice de Neergaard
Lieutenant Werner	Stefan Schnabel
General von Obermann	Ed. Begley
Major Kranz	Theo. Goetz
Captain Richter	Peter von Zerneck
Sentry	George Dice
Village Elder	Lester Alden
Georgius	Royal Dana Tracy
Thanos	John Buckwalter
John	Harron Gordon
Helen	Naya Grecia
Michael	Jack W. Bittner
Peter Melinas	Norman Rose
Schoolteacher	Charles Kuhn
Wagon-maker of Mandra	Whitford Kane
Lambros	Karl Weber
Old Villager	Harron Gordon

NEW YORK TIMES
September 22, 1943

'Land of Fame'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"LAND OF FAME," which Albert and Mary Bein wrote and the former has produced in association with Frederick Fox, has at least one thing in its favor—it is on a serious subject, the war. For the first time this season the theatre has tried earnestly to express something of what is in the mind of that part of the world wishing to be free. The intentions of the play, which had its first performance last night at the Belasco, are on the right side, but unfortunately the arrow has again fallen short of the mark, and, barring a few scenes, "Land of Fame" is not the best the Broadway stage can offer.

The story of the play is that of Greece under the Nazi rule, a Greece that always had fought for freedom, and is doing so again, through little bands in the hills, through peasants, shepherds, farmers. As a story it also parallels Mr. Steinbeck's "The Moon Is Down," in that the Nazis once more are learning the lessons of the fly-paper. It is a story of warfare behind the lines, which "Winter Soldiers" of last year did better, since its types were clearer and its objects more sharply defined. Mr. Bein has contributed one or two unusual pieces to the stage, but the pity of it is that on this greater subject he has not done his most inspired work.

For "Land of Fame" is loosely constructed, as though it were a casual tale and not a believable history of heroic human beings. Not enough attention has been paid to the smaller characters, so that many of them seem to form a murky sort of background crowd instead of becoming the individuals the Beins obviously wish. There is melodrama also which goes over the line of excitement and becomes an attitude, which sometimes is due to the construction and sometimes to the playing. The story of the present-day hills of Greece would be better served by a simple story simply told, rather than by one which grows entangled in devices that are only for the theatre.

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For the most part, the acting does not serve to lift the play from itself. Such a well-known player as Whitford Kane has a very minor role, being in fact only one of the members of the background. Norman Rose has the principal part, that of the guerrilla leader, and from the other side of the footlights he seems to lack the authority a former lieutenant colonel in the Greek Army would possess. Beatrice Straight is the girl, the leader's sweetheart, and appears not easy in the role; Beatrice de Neergaard has another minor role as an old woman; Stefan Schnabel, as a Gestapo man whose heart is with freedom, is honest at the beginning but overacts at the end.

Mr. Fox, whose settings sometimes are spectacular, has given rather complicated ones to his own production. One is a room, the other a hilltop, the actors descending this latter over its face rather than by the easier steps. A minor point but one which makes it impossible to believe that "Land of Fame" is not just a play in a theatre.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
September 22, 1943

Greek Patriots Fight Nazis In a Fairish 'Land of Fame'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"LAND OF FAME" is Greece . . . the land of poets and marble temples, of Spartans, Thermopylae and Marathon. It is a land where men have often fought and won against great odds, and now, in the Albert and Mary Bein play which opened last night at the Belasco, it is a land where Greek guerrillas are warring against Nazi invaders with wit and stealth to make up for lack of numbers.

The spark of freedom is in the Beins' drama—but it touches off no flame, and a spark without a flame is just another cigarette lighter gone dry. Most of the time last night I found myself quite unhappily unwarmed, listening too often to actors making speeches rather than to people fighting the hated German to the death.

Fine Physical Production

Peter Melinas, the Beins' guerrilla hero, is no Robert Jordan and their "Land of Fame" is no Hellinic "For Whom the Bell Tolls." I wish so much that this were not so, for there are some good things in this new offering. The play is excellently and imaginatively mounted by Albert Fox and interestingly costumed by Grace Houston. It is sometimes effective in its indictment of the Nazi mind, and it contains a novelty in a war play—a Gestapo lieutenant of culture who longs for the Germany of Goethe and Schiller and Beethoven and gets shot for saying so.

Peter Melinas and his ragged men haunt the hills and forest neighboring the village of Talom after the Germans have moved in in the Summer of 1942. They disrupt convoys, blow up bridges and trains. Because of them, the Germans have made a Greek Lidice of another village, Mandra, by murdering the entire populace.

Now they are holding the townsfolk of Talom as hostages, and they, too, will be killed unless the patriot Malinas gives himself up; for the German conquerors are uneasy, as they were in John Steinbeck's "The Moon Is Down."

Last-Gasp Revenge

Malinas gives himself up—but he and his sweetheart are tricked. The Greeks, however, find another trick far back in their ancient history as warriors, and before he dies Peter has the great pleasure of shooting a Nazi general in the back.

Some times "Land of Fame" is uncertainly spoken and uncertainly cast. It seems odd to find Whitford Kane beneath the rags and beard of an ancient Greek wagon maker, or Beatrice de Neergaard hobbling and croaking as a 100-year-old patriot. But Stefan Schnabel, son of Pianist Artur, is interesting and convincing as a Ferdinand the Bull among the Gestapo, and Beatrice Straight gives an incandescent performance as the guerrilla chief's hapless sweetheart, whom the Nazis use as an officers' whore before they hang her.

The German types are mostly all right, with Hunter Gardner as a colonel who is plain scared, and therefore executed, and Ed Begley as a roaring general. Many of the players are from the radio, and it is to be remarked that Begley, who is der Fuehrer's general in "Land of Fame," plays a Greek guerrilla in a long-wave cliffhanger called "Hap Harrigan." Norman Rose is, I am afraid, less than incendiary in the all-important role of Peter Melinas.

There is some incidental music by Joseph Wood which is effective here and there. It sounds a little like Prokofieff's "Lieutenant Kije" suite.

"Land of Fame"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
September 22, 1943

'Land of Fame' Opens at the Belasco and the Old Master Turns in His Grave

By BURTON RASCOE

WHEN a play as amateurish in plot, structure and dialogue, as silly in development, and as shoddily produced and acted as is Land of Fame, which opened at the Belasco last night, the temptation is to say that the authors and producers' intentions were meritorious. You must consider we are at war, Greece is one of our allies, and the play is about the resistance of Greek guerrillas to the Nazi occupation.

But, when you come right down to it, such an extenuation in behalf of a piece of theatrical claptrap is baseless and fallacious. For the intention of the authors and producers of Land of Fame is, first and foremost, to make money out of the play. Otherwise, if their intentions were purely unselfish and evangelical, they would have ceded their rights, royalty free, to the Greek Relief Society or some other humanitarian organization and devoted their time and efforts without pay to productions of the play before large numbers of people free of charge or at nominal admission fees.

When I hear that the author and a Broadway producer have refused to accept any money for the movie rights to some play which has a war or patriotic theme, because they are anxious to do their bit for civilian morale, then I shall know they are not trying to capitalize on the war and profiteer in wartime emotions. But just as long as they expect to make money, their motives must be regarded as purely commercial and their products judged solely on that basis.

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An "Original Story"

Land of Fame is by Albert and Mary Bein and produced by Mr. Bein and Frederick Fox. It is based, so the program states, on an "original story" by Charles Paver and Mr. Bein. That "original story" designation is a movie term. It doesn't necessarily mean that the story has appeared in print, or that it is original in the usual meaning of the word. It could mean that the Messrs. Paver and Bein are "story" concocters, as distinguished from scenario writers, for the movies; and that they wrote this "original" in outline on a few sheets of paper as the working basis for a scenario writer, and that Mr. Bein and Mrs. Bein later worked it up into something for the stage.

The play reeks of the movie studio script factories—those which are given over to the production of Grade C westerns, war horror stuff and boy-and-girl-and-outlaw dramas—the kind that are often produced by shuffling a pack of index cards, on which are noted various situations and gag lines, and playing them pretty much as they fall. Not once was any sense of reality achieved on the stage last night, in spite of one excellent bit of pantomime by young Kenneth Le Roy. It went for naught, because he was surrounded by highly ridiculous figures, supposed to be Nazi officers, speaking ridiculous lines and acting like stock villains in melodramas of the old silent days in the movies.

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Same Old Claptrap

When, after a number of tedious scenes, in which most of the players acted as though they had never been on the stage before, Whitford Kane appeared (unrecognized in his make-up) there was a perceptible gasp of relief in the audience that at last an actor had shown up in the cast who had the assurance of a seasoned professional; but Mr. Kane did not push his advantage; He seemed, indeed, to be eager to merge imperceptibly in the background.

I said in the beginning that the play is about the resistance of Greek guerrillas to the Nazi invaders. It is that vaguely. But it is really something thrown together out of hack fiction stories which have appeared in magazines over a period of about four years concerning the European underground revolt against the Nazis, in nearly all of which a dozen civilians outwit the whole German High Command, wipe out a regiment and take prisoner a general, 20 staff officers and an assortment of Gestapo men, whom they execute after a guerrilla leader delivers them an oration. Last night's exhibit had a Gestapo chief who quoted Byron, poetized about the Acropolis, indulged in sarcastic remarks about Hitler and his gangsters, tried to save his soul by going over to the Greek patriots, and got shot by a German officer.

Rude laughter, scattered through the audience, punctuated much of the dismal doings. Miss Beatrice Straight hung up a record for amateurishness in acting, which I think will be hard to beat this season, although Hunter Gardner was a runner-up for the honor. Beatrice de Neegaard and Norman Rose might have achieved something if they had had something to work with; they had professional assurance.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
September 22, 1943

Greek Guerrillas

By HOWARD BARNES

ALBERT and Mary Bein have been more earnest than artful in "Land of Fame." Their account of Greek guerrillas, stubbornly fighting the Nazi oppressors a year ago, carries an inherent burden of dramatic power. At times they have given their theme the special, impassioned eloquence which it is the privilege of artists to bring to recorded human experience. More frequently they have let their play fall back on one's instinctive reaction to the ruthless invasions of the Wehrmacht, whether it be in Norway, or on the plains below Thermoplae. The new Belasco Theater offering has stirring subject matter, but it is badly wanting in cohesive theatrical force.

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It is a late date, of course, for a show describing the after-effects of Nazi invasion. John Steinbeck, in "The Moon Is Down," set a stage pattern for this type of dramaturgy. The screen has exploited it on countless occasions. Unfortunately, the authors of "Land of Fame" have not breathed enough vitality and originality into their reconstruction of present-day tragedy to make it stand up through three acts. There are scenes which flare up with a certain grandeur, as a whole people is shown fighting for freedom, but the end of the play is muffled in gunpowder, melodramatics, and tricky theatricals.

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The best portions of the work deal with the reactions of German garrisons and their unfortunate civilian hostages to an occupation which depends ultimately on extermination. The Nazi officers, bearing down on a foothill village, are extremely individualistic, from the hangman general to the culture-loving Gestapo lieutenant, who gets shot for making untoward remarks about Byron and the Greek tradition of independence. They are much more than stock figures, but they indulge in stock gestures before the final curtain. The Greek patriots, curiously enough, are not nearly as clearly drawn in this play about occupied Europe as their oppressors.

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The scheme of the guerrilla leader, for example, to liberate his home town by smashing a relief convoy, is related so much in "The Perils of Pauline" tradition, that it saps most of the strength from the preceding scenes. The final pay-off, in which he comes down off the gallows to shoot the German general, is definitely hard to take. The players all do their best under Bein's fluent direction. Beatrice Straight is especially good as the sweetheart of the guerrilla chief; Stefan Schnabel is excellent as the non-Nazi Gestapo agent and Norman Rose is fine as the martyred symbol of Greek liberty. Frederick Fox, who has collaborated with Bein on the production, has also devised some effective settings for the production, and there is incidental music by Joseph Wood which heightens a dramatic interest which should have resided in the play's lines.

"Bright Lights of 1944"

NEW YORK POST
September 17, 1943

"Brights Lights of 1944" Dismal Revue at the Forrest

By WILELLA WALDORF

"BRIGHT LIGHTS OF 1944," the "intimate musical revue" presented last night at the Forrest Theatre, is about as bright as lower Fifth Avenue in the dimout. Now and then there's a faint glimmer, but for the most part it is dismal.

The original title was "Bright Lights." They recklessly added the "of 1944" only a few days ago. How anybody connected with the production could ever have imagined for an instant that it would last until 1944 it is impossible to say. If it is still here next week, we shall be amazed.

At the beginning there's a bit of plot about a bevy of "producers" luring a backer into Sardi's and deciding to put on a show called "Bright Lights." Since nobody knows anything about show business, they let a couple of the waiters do the casting for them. The waiters are Joe Smith and Charles Dale. When the backer finally talks out—wise man—Smith and Dale decide the show must go on. It does, alas!

Old Vaudeville Skits

Since the comic material placed at the actors' disposal is not only poor but meagre, the old-timers are forced back on some of their early vaudeville numbers. That's all very well in a variety show that doesn't pretend to offer anything very novel, but "Bright Lights of 1944" is supposed to be a new revue. Our first-night seats were marked $5.50 each.

Nevertheless, it was the old stuff that made it possible to stay in the theatre until after eleven o'clock, a customary procedure when you're reviewing a performance.

James Barton, back at his old song-and-dance game, sings a bit, steps a bit, indulges in a jam session with John Kirby's energetic Negro band, and of course, puts on his famous drunk act. We have never been one to swoon with admiration over Mr. Barton, but he has his points.

Back to Dr. Kronkite

Frances Williams, who used to be a sensation in the "Scandals," still looks pretty snappy and has a way with a song when she can find one. The songs in "Bright Lights of 1944" are generally seedy. One of them, presumably the theme song, is called "Thoughtless."

Smith and Dale, besides acting as waiters at Sardi's for a spell, finally get around to their famous Dr. Kronkite skit, it is still funny low-brow vaudeville patter, but would undoubtedly seem a lot funnier if we didn't know most of it by heart after all these years.

The Kirby band helps to pep up the stage fairly often and Jere McMahon and Billie Worth are a nice couple of hoofing youngsters, but the rest is inept and amateur.

Renee Carroll, Sardi's familiar hat check girl, made a couple of brief appearances as herself, remarking at one point that she had money in the show. We hope for Renee's sake it was just a gag.

"Bright Lights of 1944"

NEW YORK TIMES
September 17, 1943

James Barton, Smith & Dale and Some Others Face 'Bright Lights of 1944'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

ONE of these days the theatre season will really be opening, instead of doing as it did again last evening, which was to lurch slightly on its left foot. That one they called "Bright Lights of 1944," and as Alexander H. Cohen and two associates offered it at the Forrest it was half revue, half vaudeville. Trying to be a combination of two things, it alas! succeeded in being neither, leaving the state of the musical stage about where it was and a Broadway public hoping that something cheerful would happen pretty soon.

The first half of "Bright Lights" is quite bad, being both dull and tedious. It seems that some people hoped to put on a show and met in Sardi's, and the comedy includes this: "Who's your backer?" "The Angel Gabriel." "Oh, a trumpet player." The second half gets a little better simply because Smith & Dale, who were not good as Sardi waiters, go back into vaudeville and do "Dr. Kronkite" again. "Dr. Kronkite" is a great sketch and has been for years, and it never stales even when in such peculiar surroundings as those of the present.

For the rest, James Barton is on hand as the star, the same James Barton who played Jeeter Lester so long at the Forrest, and makes his first appearance in the revue with a song about that. Mr. Barton does his drunk scene, which is familiar and good, if a little long, and takes part in several other numbers. The band of John Kirby also is there, a good band. Frances Williams is on hand to shout songs in the old familiar way, though for the most part they are not very good songs.

'BRIGHT LIGHTS OF 1944'

Intimate revue, staged by Dan Eckley, settings designed by Perry Watkins; presented at the Forrest Theater Thursday, September 16, 1943, by Alexander H. Cohen, Martin Poll and Joseph Kipness. Cast includes James Barton, Frances Williams, Joe Smith, Charles Dale, Buddy Clark, Jayne Manners, John Kirby, Tommy Gleason, Jere McMahon, Billie Worth, Renee Carroll.

Norman Anthony and Charles Sherman are credited with the dialogue of the show, with an assist by Joseph Erens, and Jerry Livingston is down as the author of the music. A young couple named Billie Worth and Jere McMahon do a good deal of the singing and dancing, and Renee Carroll, the fabulous hat-check girl of Sardi's, is in the cast, playing herself. At any time from her station in the restaurant she can hear show business talk much better than "Bright Lights of 1944"; as entertainment for a full evening in the theatre it is, as Dr. Kronkite would say, dubious.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
September 17, 1943

Brights Lights of 1944 Cast Pall Over Spirit of Our Reviewer

By BURTON RASCOE

I SHOULD have stood in bed. And invited Paul Martin to cover Bright Lights of 1944, which opened at the Forrest last night. For Mr. Martin is familiar with the stuff that has been haphazardly thrown together and called an "intimate musical revue." Most of the acts have been making the night-club circuit. In fact, it is, as a whole, vastly inferior in quality to a standard revue in the better night clubs and is more like a badly arranged tryout for the benefit of talent scouts, with one or two good numbers thrown in for sucker bait.

Mr. Martin, moreover, would have appreciated the allusions which escaped me. For instance, the whole first act is given over to some business about three penniless producers, who think they have hooked a utensil manufacturer from Pottstown, Pa., for the money to back a musical revue, because the doddering old lecher has hopes that his love for a floosie, who thinks she can sing, will be returned if he angels a production which will give her the break she wants.

This quaint quintet meet in a restaurant which Mr. Martin must know about, because it is supposed to be a very famous one, where "all the celebrities" go. As represented last night, this eatery is a shabby place, with tasteless uncomfortable red benches running around the walls, rickety tables so scantily covered with soiled and cottony tablecloths that you can see the nail holes in the woodwork, and rows of badly framed, very amateurish drawings, supposed to be caricatures of celebrities, on the walls.

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Some Sidelights

The waiters in this famous restaurant are represented as being two frowsy and insanitary-looking individuals in clown suits, who sell the customers phony 1943 "champagne" at fancy prices, act as gyp talent agents on the side, carry on conversations in which they spit in each other's faces, and proceed on the theory, as one of them tells the other, "You mustn't insult the customers until they have paid the check." . . . (If Bright Lights is an advertisement for this famous restaurant so are those "Wanted" posters on the jail house and postoffice bulletin boards advertisements.)

The celebrities who frequent the joint are represented as being three lunatics whose customary procedure in producing a play is to order a bottle of whisky and get the whole show outlined—including the book, lyrics, music and talent—before they empty the bottle, which they do in record time. . . . We are supposed to understand that what we saw last night is the result of one of those sessions of three lunatics with a bottle. . . . Candid about it, what?

I am not one of those who are clinically interested in the ways Broadway shows get produced, however unpleasant and bizarre some of these ways may be. My job is merely to appraise the results. So I found nearly the whole first half of last night's venture exceedingly dreary and stupid, except for a comical drunk act by James Barton and the dancing of a kid named Jere McMahon, who must be all of 16 years old, as appealing in appearance as that kid who stole the movie, Stage Door Canteen, and a dancer who, I predict, will some day be in Fred Astaire's class, if he doesn't get caught in the draft and bunged up or killed in the war.

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Rest of the Show

The other acts are: Songs by Frances Williams, Jayne Manners, Billie Worth and James Barton; song and dance numbers of young McMahon and Billie Worth; two or three comedy dialogues by the veterans of the famous Avon Comedy Four—Joe Smith and Charlie Dale; John Kirby and his jive orchestra; the Royal Guards, good quartet; songs by Buddy Clark, and one tableau—an amusing depiction of that great tragedy celebrated in song, Frankie and Johnny, as sung by Frances Williams and enacted by James Barton, Jayne Manners, Mimi Lyons and the six girls (all shapely) who make up the chorus of Bright Lights.

To my mind, aside from the dancing of young McMahon, the only really good parts of the show were the overtures by an excellent orchestra in the pit under the direction of Max Meth.

The production is by Alexander H. Cohen, in association with Martin Poll and Joseph Kipness.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
September 17, 1943

It's Plain and Fancy Vaudeville, Oldtimers in Old Routines

By ROBERT GARLAND

THE new arrival at the Forrest Theatre can't quite make up its mind. Calling itself an "intimate musical revue," it is nothing of the kind. Starting out revuesically, with Mr. Sardi's celebrated bistro as background, it soon settles down to plain and fancy vaudeville. This vaudevile is at its best when plain, with tried-and-true Old Timers repeating the tried-and-true routines that brought them fame and fortune.

Then, "Bright Lights of 1944" is up-and-at-'em entertainment. James Barton, Frances Williams and Smith and Dale know their way around any vaudeville stage. They could go through their numbers with their eyes shut. They probably do, if the truth were known. It is only when they open their eyes and try something new and different that they sometimes lose their way.

In "Bright Lights of 1944" the Old Timers try precious little that is new and different. And, as long as they stick to the old and the familiar, the audience sticks by them.

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James Barton is first seen asleep on the old front porch of his home on Tobacco Road, with a Rip Van Winkle wig and long white whiskers. When he awakes, he goes into a song called "Damned Old Jeeter," which must have seemed like a good idea at the time it was written. But, having cast wig and whiskers aside, he comes actually into his own with "I Can't Give You Anything But Love," sung with dancesteps and gestures.

The evening is really his when he goes into his famous drunk routine. This, believe me, is, was and always will be, one of the most expert pieces of pantomime you have ever seen. As was the cast with Mr. Barton's Jeeter Lester, Mr. Barton's nameless pest may be funny on the surface. But, underneath, he is a tragic and bewildered human being.

Two other Old Timers are the Smith and Dale, whose "Dr. Kronkite" sketch is a vaudeville, even a burlesque, classic. Revived last night, for what must be the 1000th time, it was even funnier than I had remembered.

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Frances Williams' style and material have not changed, although the words of her songs are different. Her rendition of "Frankie and Johnny" is forthright and dramatic, as Jayne Manners as Frankie, James Barton as Johnny and Mimi Lynne as Nellie Bly, act out the ancient bar-room ballad is dance and pantomime. Miss Williams and Miss Manners, along with Billie Worth, again win the audience with "A Lick, and a Riff, and a Slow Bounce."

Several of the songs are equally unusual. They're "Don't Forget the Girl from Punxsutawney," "That's Broadway," "Back Bay Beat," "Your Face Is Your Fortune," "We're Having Our Fling" and "Yes, I Love You Honey," which Mr. Barton makes his own. To all this add John Kirby and His Orchestra, who play "salon swing." The Royal Guards, who sing, and Renee Carroll, who acts just the way she acts in Sardi's.

It's a curiously uneven show, this "Bright Lights of 1944." But when, abetted by Max Meth's hot and unbothered orchestra, it gets good and jumping, it's as much fun as anything of its kind in town.

"Bright Lights of 1944"

NEW YORK SUN
September 17, 1943

'Bright Lights of 1944,' Intimate Revue, Has Premiere at the Forrest

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THIS new theatrical season certainly keeps trying and it has variety, at least. One night there is Negro folk opera, another evening brings along multiple-scene realistic drama, and now comes an intimate revue. This exhibit is called "Bright Lights of 1944" and it's at the Forrest, a playhouse inhabited for all those years by the turnip-eaters of "Tobacco Road."

"Bright Lights," sponsored by the youthful Alexander H. Cohen and associates, is a revue without class. Its comedy is on the sleazy side, but there are good numbers here and there and after a somewhat distressing first half there is a decided and welcome improvement in the second. The premiere performance was given last night in 49th Street.

This new show may have started with some sort of book but all traces of such have now disappeared and the entertainment is presented in vaudeville-revue form. The principal participants are the shuffling and loose-limbed James Barton, the vocal and energetic Frances Williams and the ageless comedy team of Smith & Dale.

Also present are Buddy Clark, the handsome Jayne Manners, to be remembered from "By Jupiter;" Billie Worth and Jere McMahon who dance delightfully, and Rene Carroll, hat-check girl at Sardi's restaurant, who knows every actor between here and the Tropic of Capricorn. Several of the show's scenes take place in the celebrity hive known as Sardi's.

If some of the comedy of the first half of "Bright Lights" doesn't get you down completely you'll enjoy a song number called "Don't Forget the Girl From Punxsutawney, Pa.", as sung by Jayne Manners and the Royal Guards. You'll certainly like John Kirby and his orchestra. This orchestra and the Royal Guards and the small, nimble and pretty chorus belong definitely with the show's assets. The pick-up in Part Two is helped along considerably by "Your Face Is Your Fortune," Frances Williams and Buddy Clark sing it; Billie Worth and Jere McMahon dance it.

James Barton tries new and old material and is certainly at home on the stage of the Forrest, for there he played Jeeter Lester countless times. The Smith & Dale team (Joe Smith and Charles Dale) relies on material as old as vaudeville itself—but it's still funny.

No prize winner, this "Bright Lights of 1944," but it has a certain freshness at times, and when it is dancing it is all right. You will see better, and also worse, musical shows as the new season rolls along.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
September 17, 1943

A Turkey Dinner at Sardi's

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

AS a tottering survivor of last week's *My Dear Public* and now of *Bright Lights of 1944*, I should like to make a modest suggestion. I think a great deal of suffering could be avoided if for a limited time—say 150 years—no one produced a musical show about people producing a musical show. These little efforts seem to have something the matter with them. They bring on some alarming ailment in the dialogue writers which spreads to the cast and is even transmitted to the audience. I cannot say why, but it is so.

Bright Lights, for example, is about a bunch of people who congregate in Sardi's—a blameless institution where I have spent many pleasant hours—and work up a revue. Their plans involve a good deal of humorous conversation that is spectacularly ghastly. It would not be tolerated in even the most abandoned home, which is doubtless why it is foisted on Sardi's. Nor is it very signally redeemed by the specialty numbers that momentarily silence it. James Barton sings some songs and imitates a drunk without proving at all noteworthy. Buddy Clark of the radio sings a song, Frances Williams sings a song, and Jayne Manners sings a suggestive song. A useful pair named Billie Worth and Jere McMahon also sing songs as well as dance, and John Kirby and his orchestra serve up some fair hot jazz.

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During the intermission Sardi's closes down for the night or goes out of business or something, so that Act II is foiled of further dialogue and proves much less of a horror. It is, in fact, just a fairly mediocre variety show. There are more songs, dances and hot jazz. Frances Williams put a little life into the proceedings, and Smith & Dale do their Dr. Kronkite act, which is always funny, but which at this late date should not have to serve as the only good thing in a show.

To conclude on a more general note, it is strange that in a season rampant with musicals there shouldn't be any decent new music.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
September 17, 1943

'Bright Lights' Doesn't Help The Broadway Dimout Much

By JOHN CHAPMAN

THERE are the makings of a show in "Bright Lights"—but no show. It takes more than a sack of tobacco, a piece of rice paper and a match to fashion a hand-set cigaret and get it going; it takes skill, too. Skill was lacking last night when "Bright Lights" was presented at the Forrest Theatre.

Billed as an intimate musical revue, it is structurally a mess. In the beginning there is some sort of plot about casting a musical in Sardi's restaurant, but after a while this is thrown away—in a covered garbage can, I hope, because it was getting high—and the rest of the numbers are tossed on the stage like so many rolls of the dice.

The makings of the show are people like James Barton, Frances Williams, Smith and Dale, John Kirby's interesting Negro band and a fairly able and quite personable young dancer named Jere McMahon. But nobody has had the skill to put them together into a smooth and well-paced entertainment.

Oh, for Some Scenery!

Nor has anybody had the money to put up anything but the most discouraged kind of scenery. Before the season is much older I hope somebody comes along with a show that can be described as lavish, so that Broadway will look less like the hall bedroom it has become and more like the institution of glitter and glamour it pretends to be.

Just because Jim Barton, Frances Williams and Smith and Dale are in "Bright Lights," it doesn't follow that the show is an old-timers' night. Barton, back on the stage where he wallowed all those years as Jeeter Lester, is an assured performer who can work in anything.

He does his old drunk sketch, "The Pest," and this and Barton's other number about the fellow who was bitten by a dog in front of every saloon are the best drunk sketches I ever saw. Jim also does a little hoofing, sings a couple of songs and then joins the Kirby orchestra for a small jam session, whapping the drums and playing boogie-woogie piano.

Dr. Kronkite Returns

Smith and Dale are cast as a couple of Sardi waiters who, being rich, take over a show when the backer walks out on his blonde girl friend. There isn't too much of this, thank goodness, and pretty soon they get back into their ancient arguments, which are fine.

They do their everlasting Dr. Kronkite turn and it was as funny as ever to me and to all the cash customers, too. They have modernized it here and there. "Be quiet," says the doc, "or I'll give you gas." "I'll take eight gallons," says the patient.

It doesn't seem right to talk of Frances Williams as an old-timer, because she is up there with all the bounce she ever had, singing songs in the same way. One she sings is "Frankie and Johnny," while Jim Barton and Jayne Manners act this sterling melodrama in pantomime. With a really professional production this number would be excellent.

But, as I said, it takes skill to put a musical together and there was no evidence of organization, authority or good taste last night. . . . Oh, yes. There were some songs, but damned if I can remember any.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
September 17, 1943

Sardi's—Without Food

By HOWARD BARNES

SARDI, whose restaurant is well-known in theatrical circles, comes off best in "Bright Lights." His eatery receives frequent mention in the course of this random intimate revue. There were first-nighters, in fact, who would gladly have traded seats at the Forrest Theater for elbow room in his establishment. For the town's newest musical show is a ragged little entertainment, saved at times by good performing, but offering almost nothing in the way of sustained merriment. There may have been some bright ideas behind the production, but they are rarely apparent in its projection.

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Essentially, it is just another vaudeville show, fobbing itself off as a regular stage attraction. There is a lengthy preamble in the first act which purports to describe the genesis of a Broadway show in a bistro. When the "angel" of the piece bows out a couple of waiters become producers. It is only when they demonstrate the sort of acts they are going to have in their offering that "Bright Lights" becomes faintly beguiling. It is only because there are a few veteran troupers and musicians on stage that this minor miracle occurs.

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At least, the best part of the musical whatnot comes last, which is always good showmanship. When James Barton forgets that he is to be the star of a revue in the making and runs through a pest drunk routine or has a jam session with John Kirby's excellent band, "Bright Lights" really lights up a bit. When Smith and Dale get out of Sardi's waiter suits and give a fast take to the Dr. Kronkite act, the show becomes both bright and lively. For most of the time there are a series of slip-shod scenes, which are likely to make one wish for a good dog act or some acrobatic stunts.

Barton, who has been tobacco-roading these many years, has not forgotten his art as a song and dance man. His jive session with Kirby's musicians is first rate, but it has no relation whatsoever to the rest of the show. Smith and Dale stumble through new material and finally hit it with two-a-day antics. As for the other performers, they are not so successful in coping with threadbare material. Frances Williams shouts a couple of ballads; Billie Worth and Jere McMahon execute some conventional tap dances; the Royal Guards harmonize rather self-consciously, and Renee Carroll, Sardi's hat-check girl, delivers one or two lines about her place of employment. The Norman Anthony-Charles Sherman dialogue does not compare well with the Joe Miller jokes of the final scene. The David Mack-Jerry Livingston songs are not much. "Bright Lights" might better have dispensed with the pretension of being a show.

"A New Life"

NEW YORK SUN
September 16, 1943

Elmer Rice's Nine-scene Drama, 'A New Life,' Begins Playwrights' Season

By WARD MOREHOUSE

ELMER RICE, a skilled, earnest and frequently social-minded man of the theater, brings the stir of a maternity hospital and the realism of childbirth to the New York stage in his new play, "A New Life," submitted last evening at the Royale as the season's first offering of the Playwrights' Company.

Told in two acts and nine scenes, "A New Life" must be put down as a definite disappointment. It is well produced, some of the roles are well played and some of the writing, particularly in the incidental portions, is shrewd and sharply observant, but it comes forth as a curiously hollow play—talky and heavy-handed.

The reporter-dramatist treatment that Mr. Rice used so successfully in his study of the tawdry brownstone front in "Street Scene" and that was again in evidence as he depicted the day-to-day hum and flow of life in the offices of a busy law firm in "Counselor-at-Law," is now applied to a New York hospital. He brings in the true atmosphere, as you could be sure he would, and puts into his scenes the crisp, brisk, starched people that you find about a great hospital that is well run. But in telling his story his play gets away from him.

"A New Life" presents a war-time romance. Edith Charles, a pretty night club singer, meets a young captain of the Air Forces, a boy of wealth and background, and they are married within two weeks. He goes to the far Pacific to fight the Japs. Nine months later the girl gives birth to a son. The flyer returns and there then ensues, for the tedious second half of the play, conflict between the spirited Edith and the parents of her husband as to what is to be the proper environment and upbringing for the potential heir to those Cleghorne millions. The play ends on a note of hope, but not until the young mother, and also the audience, have had some tough going.

Elmer Rice, in presenting the story of the night club singer and her young war hero, shows himself to be disturbed about the attitude of the men in service, once they've come back home and the war is won. He reveals his definite concern for children born in such times as these, and he has also been wondering just what sort of world they are to face twenty years hence.

In "A New Life" Mr. Rice, a dramatist of tremendous success and nearly thirty years' experience, fares better with his minor characters than with his principals. The characters of the reactionary millionaire and his snobbish wife are indeed hard to take. Walter N. Greaza, usually one of the theatre's most convincing actors, can't do much with the role of the elder Cleghorne, and I don't know any actor who could. Merle Maddern has a trying time as the captain's mother.

The heroine's role is played by Betty Field, and it's her best job to date. She is a fine young actress who is to be regarded as one of the theater's hopes. In her present role she is shown standing, sitting and lying down—and in the agonies of childbirth. It is not an easy part to play and, at times, not easy to watch. Ann Thomas, rasping, gawky and wisecracking, does wonders with the character of Edith's earthy girl friend. Miss Thomas has a sure comedy sense, something in the style of Dennie Moore of a few seasons ago—only better. John Ireland, glib and sardonic, is effective in his scenes of conflict with the capitalist, speaking for the masses, for the Merchant Marine—and for Mr. Rice. Joan Wetmore gives reality to a small role. And Blaine Cordner as Dr. Acton is a man of medicine you might meet any afternoon in the gleaming corridors of Lenox Hill.

"A New Life," bringing the vital Playwrights' Company into action again, is the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth play that Elmer Rice has given to Broadway since he startled the town with "On Trial" back in 1914. There are some good touches in this new piece, as there are in anything he writes, but as a play "A New Life" misses. I wish the Playwrights' Company were off to a better start.

'A NEW LIFE'

Play by Elmer Rice; staging by Mr. Rice and settings by Howard Bay; presented by the Playwrights' Company at Royale Theatre, Wednesday, September 15, 1943. The cast:

Theodore Emery	Sanford McCauley
Miss Hanson	Alice Thomson
Miss Devore	Colleen Ward
Miss Murphy	Ann Driscoll
Miss Weatherby	Sara Peyton
George Sheridan	Kenneth Tobey
Lillian Sheridan	Timmie Hyler
Esther Zuckerman	Dorothy Darling
Mollie Kleinberger	Dora Weissman
Edith Charles Cleghorne	Betty Field
Olive Rapallo	Ann Thomas
Gustave Jensen	John Ireland
Dr. Lyman Acton	Blaine Cordner
Miss Kingsley	Frederica Going
Samuel Cleghorne	Walter N. Greaza
Isabelle Cleghorne	Merle Maddern
Millicent Prince	Joan Wetmore
Grover C. Charles	Arthur Griffin
Miss Swift	Terry Harris
Ruth Emery	Helen Kingstead
Miss Woolley	Shirley Gale
Captain Cleghorne	George Lambert
Henrietta Dunstan	Elizabeth Dewing
Herbert Dunstan	Nicholas Saunders

NEW YORK TIMES
September 16, 1943

Elmer Rice Discussed 'A New Life' in the Drama Which Opened Last Night at the Royale

By LEWIS NICHOLS

ELMER RICE is one of the theatre's star reporters as well as a man who is always deeply interested in the welfare of his fellows. He also is a craftsman, able to work the most from the material he has on hand. But with the opening of "A New Life" last evening at the Royale, it became apparent that not every Elmer Rice play can be a "Street Scene" or a "Counsellor-At-Law," that he also can turn out an occasional disappointment. For his latest play is a little stereotyped, its characters are a bit too pat; the craftsman is there to direct the lines, but an evening in the theatre with a craftsman only leaves a dismal feeling that something is lacking.

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The difficulty lies in the play, which, surprisingly from Mr. Rice, follows the set formula of the rich young man and the night-club singer. He is a flier, and shortly after they meet they marry, and then he goes to the Pacific and is lost for months. The setting of the play is a hospital in which she is having her baby, which arrives just as the flier returns. Then comes the matter of the child's upbringing; whether he shall become the youngest generation of the conservative steel trust, as wished by his grandfather, or shall stay with his mother, who wishes him to keep an "independent spirit." Since the formula can have only one ending, the baby stays with the parents.

As character-drawing, "A New Life" seems more than a little casual for a man of Mr. Rice's stature. The grandfather was an America Firster and sold steel to the Japs; he has fat war contracts and rides in a private railroad car. As he emerges on the stage he is like a caricature of Capital rather than a human being. The son remains a confused figure, who succeeds only in being weak. At the opposite end is a young merchant seaman, a friend of the singer, who fought in Spain and realizes the world must be taken back from the enemy, but who sounds unfortunately as though he were merely speaking lines in a play.

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Mr. Rice's family luckily has an actress among its members—Betty Field, who is Mrs. Rice. She gives a charming performance in the part of the young mother, who is trying to be honest with herself, her husband and the future. Walter N. Greaza is the grandfather, looking every inch a steel king, and John Ireland is the merchant marine friend. George Lambert has the misfortune of being the flier, since the role is not well drawn; Ann Thomas has the fortune of being the wise-cracking girl friend, who is a type but amusing.

As in all of Mr. Rice's plays, there are a number of quick character sketches of a line or two which are excellent; and as is the case when he directs, the staging is exact. There is one scene while the child is being born which will be discussed; it shows only Miss Field's head as she talks in a monologue, and it can be regarded as effective or unpleasant as the audience wishes. A child coming into the world today well could be the subject for a great play, but in "A New Life" Mr. Rice has not written it.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
September 16, 1943

A Visit From A Lame Stork

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

WITH *A New Life*, the new season last night took its first steps in anything resembling a serious direction. Unfortunately the steps are largely halting ones, and the play only moves toward the serious after it has been blindfolded and turned three times around as though it were going to pin the tail on the donkey. Mr. Rice has written about a newborn child in a maternity hospital, and the first half of *A New Life*, daubed with local color, sprinkled with maternity-ward gags, and topped with delivery-room bravura, is pretty much of a woman's matinee special. It is only after mother and child are doing well that Mr. Rice gets around to his Theme.

The child, you see, comes of two different strains. The mother is a spunky, independent-minded young radio actress, born to hard work and a sense of personal dignity. The father, a young officer, is the son of a hard-shelled tycoon, a millionaire who did business with Hitler until it became profitable as well as patriotic to work with Uncle Sam. In the struggle between the two sides of the family over how the baby shall be brought up is symbolized the struggle of the future—the democratic as against the plutocratic way of life. Mr. Rice, of course, is on the side of the angels and he finally converts the baby's badly torn father to the same camp, thus permitting morality and happiness to walk off arm-in-arm at the final curtain. But though one approves of Mr. Rice's sentiments, one cannot approve of very much else.

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For not only has *A New Life* serious faults, but some of them are of a kind you cannot respect. That parts of the play are clumsy, that other parts are garrulous, that it fails to achieve dramatic impact or even any real dramatic form—these things certainly detract from it, but they are merely the fortunes of playwriting. What is far more culpable is that most of *A New Life* seems written *at* the audience, even to the extent of trying to raise a laugh in the most inappropriate places. It is merely glib of Mr. Rice to picture the life of a maternity ward for what it is worth in stock humorous recognitions; it is merely shallow of him to write his crucial scenes as though they were public rather than private matters. But when—to offer the most glaring example—he portrays a woman in labor for anything he can get out of it, one can only be appalled. A woman in labor may talk very oddly indeed, but it is scarcely possible that she will talk like Mr. Rice's heroine, so that her words have the precise effect of gags.

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Much the best thing in *A New Life* is Betty Field's portrayal of the young mother; it is honest, skillful and appealing. As the father, George Lambert steadily improves after an unimpressive start, and Walter N. Greaza and Merle Maddern stay nicely within bounds as the plutocratic grandparents. In a stencilly showgirl role, Ann Thomas offers another of her amusing characterizations, and there is some pleasant playing of bit parts. Howard Bay's sets will start any father in the audience pacing all over again.

"A New Life"

NEW YORK POST
September 16, 1943

Elmer Rice's 'A New Life' At the Royale Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

ELMER RICE and his wife, Betty Field, are the parents of a handsome baby born last December. During his sojourn in the hospital waiting room, Mr. Rice apparently took copious notes and the result is "A New Life," produced by The Playwrights' Company last night at the Royale Theatre. Miss Field, who acts the principal role spends the first five scenes having a baby and the rest of the performance battling her aviator husband's oppressively wealthy parents for the custody of the child.

"A New Life" is not one of Mr. Rice's more inspired works. It is, however, very typical of his dramatic style. The formula has become so familiar that not only the plot development but most of the characters seemed old stuff even before the author got around to introducing them. There were times when it all sounded like a revival of something Mr. Rice might have written several years ago if he had happened to get around to it.

Labor Pains and the Class Struggle

The obstetrical details of the explicit first act are doubtless perfectly accurate if hardly delectable drama, but the author, of course, has something deeper on his mind than the mere business of giving birth. After the labor pains are over, there's still the class struggle to reckon with.

The mother of the child in "A New Life" is a night club singer who comes from a small-time vaudeville family and has been pretty much on her own since the age of ten, in a whirlwind wartime courtship she has married an Army aviator now missing somewhere in the Pacific. The husband is not just any fellow in uniform. He's the son of Samuel Cleghorne, the steel tycoon, who's so important he rides around in a private railway car even in wartime and turns livid with fury at the mere mention of That Man in the White House.

The Cleghornes, though regretting their son's hasty marriage to a young woman of the lower orders, plan to whisk her and her new born child off to their ranch in Arizona where the babe will have all the superior advantages of an air-conditioned nursery, but the night club singer is an independent creature who has no more use for the Cleghornes than Elmer Rice has.

Betty Field gives what is presumably a very realistic performance in the delivery room, and she is, as always, an attractive actress, though she did strike us as a bit too ladylike and lacking in zing for the role Mr. Rice seemed to have written for her. Ann Thomas, an old Rice standby, is as amusing as ever in her breezy act as the friend from a night club chorus line, while John Ireland, as a fellow who fought in the Spanish civil war, takes care of the author's political and economic platitudes with becoming severity.

Lampooning the Upper Classes

For a major dramatist, Mr. Rice is still amazingly unconvincing when it comes to portraying plutocracy rampant. Walter N. Greaza and Merle Maddern struggle hard to make the elder Cleghornes at least faintly believable, but Mr. Rice still sees the upper classes as bloated figures in a New Masses cartoon. The filthy rich in his plays always sound like a mixture of Westbrook Pegler, the Big Bad Wolf and Foxy Grandpa. Mr. Rice is at his best in introducing amusing incidental characters among the hospital visitors, nurses, etc.

Sometimes we wonder if he hasn't simply taken to casting such actresses as Ann Thomas and Dora Weissman in his plays and letting the characters take care of themselves.

For our taste there are too many labor pains in "A New Life," and when it came to writing a play to go with them, Mr. Rice seems to have reached into a cluttered desk drawer and come up with a smeary rubber stamp.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
September 16, 1943

'Hospital Scene'

By HOWARD BARNES

ELMER RICE takes an obstetrical view of the world crisis in "A New Life." The nine scenes of his play are set in the maternity wing of a hospital, where one is permitted to sit in on the final stages of childbirth and listen in on conflicting plans for an infant's future. It is a tricky dramatic framework, allowing the author to discourse on a variety of subjects against the background of eternal verities. Unfortunately the whole work is more tricky than profound. There are flashes of brilliant characterization at the Royale. There are moments of moving intensity. Added together they make for very little vital entertainment in a tedious show.

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For the author is far less interested in human beings and significant experience than he is in a rather confused vision of a brave new world. The child of the title, with a night-club singer for mother, an aviator hero for father and a domineering steel magnate for grandfather, is certainly in the middle. He did not appear to be very much in the clear at the final curtain, although his parents seemed to be getting together on some sort of realistic approach to the future. Mr. Rice has got his economics, politics and straight drama rather jumbled in this first production of the Playwrights' Company this season.

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As a matter of fact, the author of "Street Scene" is at his best when he is merely reporting a hospital scene. The people who wander past the delivery room and a nursery, or who work at bringing new lives into the world are believeable and sometimes engaging. They are much easier to take than the opposing personalities, who are already trying to shape a youngster's life before he is two weeks old. The independent and right-thinking mother comes through with considerable force, and so does her former admirer, who has fought with the Spanish Loyalists. The playboy soldier, who has learned to meditate in a Pacific jungle, is a stock figure, and his tycoon parents are conventional and rather silly ogres.

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As was to have been expected, the Playwrights' Company has given the drama all sorts of production breaks. Betty Field, as the singing mother who resents the smug intrusions of her wealthy in-laws, gives a fine and honest portrayal. John Ireland is excellent as the rebellious young man who backs up her decision to make her son stand on his own feet and Ann Thomas has a lusty bit as her night-club pal. On the other hand, Walter N. Greaza and Merle Maddern have trouble with the grandparent roles, and George Lambert is far from convincing as the aviator. When the cast falters it is generally the play's fault and that of the author-director. Incidentally, the Howard Bay settings are excellent, even to the brief glimpse of the twilight zone. "A New Life" tackles a big subject in an effective background, but it is too rarely dramatically moving or intellectually stimulating.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
September 16, 1943

With Wife's Help, Elmer Rice Bears a Baby in 'A New Life'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IT IS ancient custom to remark upon how many, many babies are born in war time, as though Nature herself were stepping in to see to it that Man doesn't utterly destroy himself through his foolish carnage. The state of pregnancy has become endemic even among male playwrights. Gestation and delivery have become so common in the comedies and dramas of the last few months that, if the theatre has its way, the present global terror will not go down in history under the second-billing title of World War II. It will be known as the First Public War.

Elmer Rice had himself a baby last night at the Royale Theatre. Assisting in the rite was Mrs. Rice (Betty Field). In one scene the entire stage is masked by a black curtain, except for one small square in which is visible the golden head of pretty Miss Field. She is in a delirium of pain and fatigue, for we are in on the last few moments of the delivery of Mr. Rice's child.

It is quite a clinical time, and when it's over you know, by golly, that you've been seeing a delivery. Not any speedy special delivery, either, like the one in Owen Davis' "The Snark Was a Boojum" in which one of three girls in an uninteresting condition had it all over with in less than 10 minutes, offstage.

An Earnest Drama

A lobby gagster last night called Mr. Rice's drama "The Stork Was a Boojum," but that was hitting below the maternity girdle. The title of the new play is "A New Life," and in it Mr. Rice, who is an earnest man, has some earnest things to say. The trouble was I found him only occasionally convincing. I am certain he is a terrific snob and he is up to his old tricks of cutting the upper classes dead again.

The story is contained in two sets, a reception room and a private room in a hospital—or three, if you want to count the black curtain for the labor interlude.

It concerns a night club dancer (Miss Field) who has had a whirlwind marriage with an aviation officer who is heir to the Cleghorne millions and the Cleghorne eminence in society. The young captain had two weeks of honeymoon, then went to the South Pacific, was shot down and has been missing. And now his baby is due.

It is a war baby—and the question is, what kind of world is it going to grow up in? Will it be forced back into the same old world we all know and hate, or will we be able to build a better world for it out of the ruins of this war?

These are grave questions, and questions to be respected when a playwright of Mr. Rice's standing debates them. But I think Mr. Rice's manner of debating is not worthy of the questions, for his recourse is to the obvious.

Whacks at Upper Set

The world we are supposed to build away from is represented by Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Cleghorne, rich, powerful and snobbish as only Elmer Rice can make them. Which is to say that they are straw people whom the playwright sets up so he can whack away at them. I have never believed in any of the upper-class folk this dramatist has set up for his plays; they seem like comic- strip characters.

The Cleghornes want to move in on the poor little night club girl and take over her baby, to bring it up to its proper position. She, a spirited and self-reliant lass, doesn't want this. She wants the baby to have a chance to make his own way.

The aviator captain miraculously returns from months in a Jap jungle. He is torn between love for his wife and the dominance of his parents, and it looks for a while as if the blue Cleghorne blood would win. But in the happy ending he takes a run-out powder on the Old Order and faces a brave new world with Miss Field and the baby.

The writing is uneven, some being oddly stilted and some, warmly human. Miss Field, gentle and appealing, gives a steadfast performance which makes her character clearest of any in the play. Walter N. Greaza and Merle Maddern do excellently by the less convincing roles of the parents.

The cast is populous, with many characters moving in and out of the hospital rooms under the author's own skilled direction. They include nurses, doctors, incipient fathers, other mothers-to-be and that very useful dramatic device, the dumb blonde showgirl with concrete adenoids and golden heart. Ann Thomas got quite a lot of applause for her job as the showgirl. George Lambert plays the young husband, and John Ireland, as a liberal merchant seaman, serves Mr. Rice as a mouth piece for social thinking.

"A New Life"

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
September 16, 1943

'New Life' Presented At Royale Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

AS FAR as I remember, little Martin Cleghorne, son of Capt. and Mrs. Cleghorne, of Elmer Rice's new play at the Royale, is the third baby to be borne right out in the open on the Broadway stage. The others were to be seen and heard in "Child of Manhattan," at the Fulton in the Spring of 1932, and "Christmas Eve," at the Henry Miller in the Winter of 1939. If I'm wrong, don't write in and tell me. It doesn't really matter.

What does matter is that The Playwrights Co. opened its season last night in 45th Street with "A New Life," Mr. Rice's 24th play. Following the current fashion in theatricals—last season it was adolescence, this season it is expectant motherhood—" A New Life" carries expectant motherhood to its obvious conclusion. At the end of the first act Edith Cleghorne has her baby. At the end of the second, she takes it home.

For a while there, she makes a fuss about this having-a-baby business. But only in one scene. Considering that there are eight other episodes, you can safely say that Edith takes motherhood—expectant and otherwise—in her stride.

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It seems that Edith is used to taking things in her stride. Born of theatrical but honest parents, she is talented, whole-hearted and easy on the eye. When we first meet her up on the stage of the Royale, her mother is in paradise, her father is in Philadelphia and she is in the maternity ward of New York's East River Hospital. She is there for the same reason the others are. But she is anxious to get it over with and go back to work.

For, although Edith is about to go on the air and is pretty certain to be starred in a musical-comedy, she is—or was, until expectant motherhood overtook her—a singer in a night club. It was there she ran into Capt. Cleghorne, a son of the rich having his final fling before departing for the jungles of Guadalcanal or, perhaps, New Guinea. It is the old, old story. Champagne, dancing and, before the Captain's departure, marriage.

The next thing Edith knows is that her husband is reported missing and that she is reporting to the maternity ward of the East River Hospital. Time has flown and the stork has flown right along with it.

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This not-too-unusual story is complicated by the appearance of Capt. Cleghorne's father and mother, who have come on from Oklahoma in a private car—railroad, not automobile—to be present at the birth of their grandchild. They want to take the child back to Oklahoma and build an air-conditioned nursery around it. Against all this anti-New Deal nonsense are Edith, an old boy friend of Edith's, a girl friend of Edith's and the audience.

Well, thanks to some beautiful, honest and impressive acting by Betty Field—remember "Three Men on a Horse," "Boy Meets Girl" and "Two on an Island?"—Edith is a credit to the play and the playwright who married her talented interpreter. According to the program, Miss Field is a direct descendent of John and Priscilla Alden. Small wonder she can project a love scene! So she, and the excellent others, bring "A New Life" to a happy, if not too startling ending.

Until, in the final stanza, Elmer Rice's new play trips itself up over none-too-happy hunks of social significance. "A New Life" is a typical Rican comedy, with dialogue, characterization and situations worthy of its distinguished author. After that, I'm not so certain—although that Manhattan nativity scene should help the box-office considerably.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
September 16, 1943

A New Life a Bright Little Thing Though Mr. Rice Gets Profound Again

By BURTON RASCOE

A NEW LIFE, written and directed by Elmer Rice and featuring Mrs. Rice (Betty Field), which opened at the Royale last night, is a pleasant, entertaining, though unexciting little drama about the clash of wills of a domineering mother-in-law and an independent-spirited daughter-in-law.

Mr. Rice obviously thinks he is more profound than that and his delusion accounts for a few rhetorical pomposities in a play which is otherwise a sound and clever piece of theatrical construction, projected with a maximum of artistic integrity. Mr. Rice is an expert craftsman; he knows how to individualize the characters he creates; how to move them about on the stage and relate them to the development of his story. Moreover, he knows how to select a good cast and direct it properly. Therefore we gladly suffer his aberration of believing he is also a thinker.

A New Life brings another obstetrical play to Broadway, but you will be relieved to learn that this one is not, like some of the others that have come and stayed or come and gone, a farce or a comedy. It is quite a serious affair. A delivery takes place on the stage, and the scene is at once realistic and in good taste. Nearly everything about this play, indeed, practically reeks with good breeding. So much so that Ann Thomas, who plays the part of a brassy, slangy little night-club gamin, with her usual delightful authenticity, seems rather pitiful, at times, against a background of so much Emily Post and such lofty left-wing cerebration.

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Scene I in Hospital

The play opens with Edith Cleghorne (Miss Field) arriving at a maternity hospital for the delivery of her child. She is a nightclub singer, who married the scion of a powerful American industrialist after a two-week's furious courtship in a fog of night club drinking and dancing. Her husband, a captain in the air force, left for the Pacific field of operations shortly after they were married and, when their child is about to arrive, he has been missing in action for many weeks and has been given up as either dead or a prisoner of the Japanese. He has had no word that he is about to become a father.

The boy's father and mother arrive at the hospital determined to take charge of mother and child. They want the child to be trained correctly to bear his burden as a Cleghorne. (It is assumed, of course, that the child will be a son, and it is.) The father of the child arrives unexpectedly in New York safe and fairly sound on the day the child is born.

Thereafter the action is entirely concerned with the fight between the elder and the younger Mrs. Cleghorne. It is a common, almost one might say, a universal fight, and of the sort that occurs no matter what the economic status of those concerned is, or has been, or what their social points of view are. The mother-in-law wants to run the lives of her son, her daughter-in-law and her grandson and the daughter-in-law will have none of it. The son at first sides with his mama and quarrels with his wife when she demands a showdown. He has to choose quickly, because he has to go back to the front again, and his wife has threatened to sue for divorce rather than sacrifice her stage career and live under the domination of her rich mother-in-law.

Rice Crusades Again

That's all there is to the play, really, and for what it is it is very good; but it would appear that Mr. Rice is under the impression that he has written a play against what he used to call Capitalism and now calls Fascism, because he has a semivillain in it who is an American industrialist whom he depicts as having upheld Franco and sold steel to Hirohito and is now growing richer on war contracts although violently opposed to Mr. Roosevelt. (Failure to see eye-to-eye with Mr. Roosevelt on all things is the queerly illogical criterium of Fascism in the eyes of Mr. Rice, who forgets that the embargo on shipments of arms to the Spanish loyalists was laid down by Mr. Roosevelt and his State Department.)

The play is so marvelously well cast that I can merely point to the cast box and say all the members of it were wonderful. Miss Field is a beautiful woman and she is also a very fine actress. She has one especially rare gift: She can seem to be talking in a softly modulated, unstrained tone, and yet make every syllable she utters clear and natural.

"My Dear Public"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
September 10, 1943

See Below for the Gory Details

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

WILLIE HOWARD is a very funny fellow, Nanette Fabray is a very pretty girl, Georgie Tapps is a lively tapdancer, and Ethel Shutta, Eric Brotherson and David Burns are all nice people. But *My Dear Public* is one of the most terrific bores I have ever sat through. Aside from half a dozen laughs Howard manages to raise almost in sheer defiance, and some of Tapps' dancing, last night's show is about as relentlessly undiverting as anything you can think of. A more suspicious man than myself might mutter something about a conspiracy, but I am perfectly willing to believe it was only a mistake.

Willie Howard drew a heavy sentence when he assayed the role of Barney Short, the zipper manufacturer. Mr. Short is not a man given to sparkling conversation, and it falls leaden on the ear, no matter in which of his many dialects Howard tries to render it. Now and then Howard gets one past the script, or strikes a reminiscent pose, or utters a telling monosyllable, but the next moment Howard is pushed into song or something, and the pall descends again.

For the songs are as uninspired as the dialogue—perhaps the best of them is being *Our Private Love Song*, which sounds like once-upon-a-time Cole Porter. The dancing is a trifle better, but not good. Eventually there arrives a ballet in the Ruritanian manner, full of gay gypsy colors and a true gypsy indifference as to whether they match.

My Dear Public is about how Barney Short (the zipper manufacturer) backs a play by an arty young poet from the Village. At least it is for awhile. Later on, it doesn't seem to be about anything.

'MY DEAR PUBLIC'

Musical show; book by Irving Caesar and Charles Gottesfeld; songs by Irving Caesar, Sam Lerner and Gerald Marks; book staged by Edgar MacGregor; presented by Mr. Caesar at the Forty-sixth Street Theater, Thursday evening, September 9, 1943, with the following cast:

Walters	David Burns
Tapps	Georgie Tapps
Jean	Nanette Fabray
Daphne Drew	Ethel Shutta
Barney Short	Willie Howard
Renee	Renee Russell
Louise	Loise Fiske
Mitzi	Mitzi Perry
Byron Burns	Eric Brotherson
Lulu	Sherle North
Gordon	Gordon Gifford
Playwright	William Nunn
Gus Wagner	Jesse White
Kelly	Al Kelly
Rose Brown	Rose Brown
Announcer	Dave Hamilton
Ruth	Janice Wallace
Edith	Edith Launer

"My Dear Public"

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
September 10, 1943

Willie Howard Heads Cast of 'Revusical Story' Presented by Irving Caesar

By ROBERT GARLAND

IF, by any chance, you were unfortunate enough to have been among those present, sober and in your right mind, last night at the 46th St. Theatre, I wish you'd write in and tell me what all the shouting was for. Frankly, I just don't know. Nobody around me knew, either.

From the playbill, I gather that a man named Caesar had something to do with "My Dear Public", which happens to have been last night's "revusical story's" name. The piece is presented by Irving Caesar, who, even if you don't ask me, should be ashamed of himself. The book—which is incredible—is by Irving Caesar, too, aided and abetted by a guy called Gottesfeld. The songs also have a Caesarian flavor, heaven help them. Or maybe I'm wrong, and they just didn't happen.

'Revusical Story'

The book, which that man Caesar wrote with the help of that guy Gottesfeld, has to do with the getting of a musical comedy on the stage. At least, I think it has. They are always talking about show business up in 46th St., and if that talk isn't getting a musical comedy on the stage, I don't know what it is. The trouble is, they just don't happen to have a musical comedy. Calling what they do have "a revusical story" doesn't make it sound any more exciting.

There's a biblical line about rendering unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's. Well, the thing which is Caesar's is at the 46th Street Theatre. He's welcome to it.

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Not even so expert a comedian as Willie Howard can do anything with Caesarian sketches. Realizing this, he just doesn't seem to try. I've been admiring Mr. Howard for at least a quarter of a century, but, in all those years, I have never seen him struggling with such un-Howardian material. Long before the final curtain fell, I expected to see him walk angrily off-stage, saying to hell with it. Frankly, I wouldn't have blamed him. He had it coming to him.

Rose Brown Clicks

The others have just as tough a time. Ethel Shutta struggles with a couple of songs called, if I remember rightly, "Little Gamins" and "Love Is Such a Cheat." "Love Is Such a Cheat" is Mr. Caesar's. Georgie Tapps does his best to live up to what the program calls him, "the Nijinsky of popular dancing." Especially in "May All Our Children Have Rhythm." But "My Dear Public" defeats him, too. And when you can defeat Georgie Tapps, you're defeating an undefeatist.

If any honest-to-goodness praise can be bestowed on last night's what-have-you, that honest-to-goodness praise must be bestowed on a talented colored girl by the name of Rose Brown. In what is probably the ugliest costume ever worn by anybody on the stage, she deals with a mediocre number known as "Color Line" as if it were a classic. There's no color line around the rainbow, it seems, and Miss Brown makes you actually believe it.

I understand that the Drama Critics' Circle is giving a booby prize for the season of 1943-1944. May I offer "My Dear Public" as my contender?

NEW YORK POST
September 10, 1943

"My Dear Public" Stars Willie Howard at the 46th St. Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

"MY DEAR PUBLIC," Irving Caesar's "revusical story" which reached the 46th St. Theatre last night, has many of the ingredients and most of the trappings of a first-rate musical show, but never quite succeeds in becoming one. We could, and shall, go right through the program giving credit to a number of able performers, composers and technicians, beginning with that old favorite, Willie Howard, but we can't become enthusiastic about the show because, except for two or three specialties, it struck us as tedious.

Willie Howard is one of Broadway's priceless comedians, but rarely does the material he has to work with measure up to his ability. He has a funny song entitled "If You Want a Deal With Russia" in which he advises President Roosevelt to send him over as Goodwill Ambassador, and every now and then the old Howard technique sees him through, but generally he is struggling against a dull book.

Almost any of his early vaudeville sketches might have been exhumed to better advantage. There were even times when we longed for Brother Gene to walk in with a couple of hefty dames to join Willie in that old travesty on the quartet from "Rigoletto."

Nanette Fabray is enchanting to look at and possessed of a most attractive personality. With a small voice, she wisely does not try to force it. No brilliant dancer, she nevertheless steps about with grace and charm.

Georgie Tapps is a dancer, and a clever one at that. Ethel Shutta knows her way about the stage. Eric Brotherson is a blameless leading man, and David Burns a comedian who deserves a better spot than the one he's in now. Rose Brown, the colored singer who played Katisha in "The Hot Mikado," had a considerable success with a throbbing Caesar song beginning "There ain't no color line around the rainbow."

Waiting for Something

That's the way it goes. "My Dear Public" is full of talent, but it is talent seldom used to advantage. There were long stretches last night when we were convinced we had wandered into one of the big picture theatres. Some of the movie houses stage very tasteful revues, full of color, dancing, song and comedy, but there is always a sensation that it is, after all, something to tide over the interval between showings of the feature film.

"My Dear Public" creates the same feeling. We were constantly waiting for something that never turned up.

Probably the chief difficulty lies in the fact that Mr. Caesar designed his work as a "revusical story." It is neither good revue nor good musical comedy, but a series of numbers strung together on a plot thread so flimsy and uninteresting that it might have been better to dispense with the "story" entirely.

Several of the songs are tuneful and all are equipped with intricate lyrics, some more intricate than amusing. The orchestrations are elaborate and often very effective even though the orchestra did have trouble executing them to please the able conductor, Harry Levant.

Since "Very Warm for May" a few seasons ago we have harbored a suspicion that it is very difficult to put on a musical show about people trying to put on a musical show. "My Dear Public" makes the suspicion a certainty.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
September 10, 1943

My Dear Public at the 46th Street Fails to Arouse Vast Enthusiasm

By BURTON RASCOE

MY pained and reluctant verdict on My Dear Public, which opened at the 46th St. Theater last night, must be thumbs down.

The pain comes from reflection upon the fact that this musical comedy has been in production for nearly a year and its costs, so I have been told, have already run up to a staggering total. The reluctance comes from the fact that the show has its good points. But two swallows do not a summer make, even when the birds are Willie Howard and Nanette Fabray.

The faults of My Dear Public are these: The music box is poor in quality and without melody or spirit; the book is banal and pointless and the straight dialogue is flat and stilted; the choreographic numbers, although attributed to Felicia Sorel, who in the past has designed some original and pretty dances, are routine in pattern and listlessly executed; much of Mr. Howard's comedy is familiar and dated; Miss Fabray is beauteous to behold and she was exquisitely costumed, but the songs she has to sing are neither bright nor tuneful, and, although it is very ungallant of me to say so, there are fewer pretty girls in the chorus than I can remember ever having seen in a musical comedy.

The merits are these: In the first act Mr. Howard is extremely funny at times and he delivers one very witty recitative, with musical accompaniment, entitled If You Want to Deal with Russia; Eric Brotherson has another satirical recitative, entitled Last Will and Testament, which is clever and amusing, even if the uninitiated find that the allusions elude them; the settings by Albert Johnson are opulent and tasteful, and the costumes, for the most part, are chic and sensuous.

* * *

Howard Uses Old Stuff

You will hardly believe it when I tell you that in this show Mr. Howard is still using his old take-off on a Communist soapboxer (the one with the tag-line, "Comes the revolution and you will eat strawberries!"), though, to be sure, he hooks it up rather funnily with a new variation—his Yiddish orator now speaks with a phony Scotch burr. But that satire is 10 years behind the times, and loyal admirers of Mr. Howard, like myself, are so familiar with it we can hear it in our sleep.

In this show Mr. Howard has his excellent stooge, Al Kelly, the double-talker, whose snappy and serious mien, when he gets excited explaining things to Mr. Howard, is comical to watch—as is also the expression of fascinated disgust on Mr. Howard's face. These two, working together, provoked gales of laughter last night, and when Mr. Howard explained, in song, why Mr. Roosevelt should send him as Ambassador to Russia the audience ran him out of verses with demands for encores.

* * *

Shutta's Material Weak

Ethel Shutta, as the wife of the zipper king (Mr. Howard), who wants her husband to back a music show so she can be a harem queen and do an Oriental dance in it, was whipped as badly as were Miss Fabray and the other principals by her material; her two songs failed to click. Rose Brown, a new (to me) colored singer of torch songs, got a big hand with a number called Color Line. Eric Brotherson, who was more amusing to me than Danny Kaye was as the swish fashion editor in Lady in the Dark, is lost in this show—and I mean actually, for he is supposed to be a playwright-director who is in love with a soubrette (Miss Fabray) whom he is going to put in a musical comedy, and he is off stage at such long intervals that you forget what part he is supposed to be playing. The orchestra, directed by Harry Levant, is so good (you can tell that by the first half of the overture—the best music of the evening) that it is too bad it didn't have something good to play.

"My Dear Public"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
September 10, 1943

Caesar Is Buried, Not Praised, For Showing 'My Dear Public'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

THANKS to the infinite comfort of a faltering memory, I cannot remember a worse musical comedy than last night's "My Dear Public." And Willie Howard, one of the great clowns, was in it.

Willie was in it and he was in there punching, too. Ethel Shutta was in it, after an absence from the stage of thirteen years, and she was in there punching. Young, pretty Nanette Fabray was in it, and her heart was in it, too.

But it seemed that the heart of no one else was there, and brains is something one just wouldn't mention.

Curly-Locks Howard

Since I last saw him, Willie Howard has grown—he must have grown, for he couldn't have bought the things—a great long set of curly locks. With these amazing tentacles floating about his flapping ears, he plunges into the role of a zipper king who backs a show because his wife is an ex-actress and is still stage-crazy.

When Mr. Howard plunges he plunges, for he is a showman. He makes the best he can out of no plot and bum lyrics, but even Willie's best is not good enough. His best last night was when he put on a patent leather wig and pretended to be a gay caballero from Mexico.

There is nothing lacking in "My Dear Public" except inspiration. The sets, while not lavish, are charming, for they were done by Albert Johnson. The chorus is fairly handsome and is well clad by Lucinda Ballard, but the girls didn't seem to care much about dancing at the premiere.

One Tune Clings

The plot, about Willie being a zipper king and having Miss Shutta for a wife, is credited to Irving Caesar and Charles Gottesfeld. The songs are by Mr. Caesar, Sam Lerner and Gerald Marks. One tune, "Feet on the Sidewalk," may be all right because Harry Levant's orchestra was clinging to it all the time, but I can't remember any set of words that had either wit or lilt.

On the good side of a painful report must go a welcome to Ethel Shutta, and a request that she stick around now that she's back. Also a cheer for Miss Fabray, who has the looks and the bounce that musical comedy heroines are made of. And there should be highly favorable recognition of Georgie Tapps, the dancer, who can do some tricks that would break the backs of his more upstage and more widely flattered contemporaries.

"My Dear Public" is by no means a cheap production and its backers may be many. One of them, I was given to understand, is Daniel Arnstein, the taxicab and truck tycoon who was the two-fisted genius of the Burma Road before the Japs moved in. Mr. Arnstein may find that Broadway is a more dangerous thoroughfare.

NEW YORK TIMES
September 10, 1943

Willie Howard, Plus a Great Many Others, Offer 'My Dear Public,' the New Musical Show at the Forty-sixth St.

By LEWIS NICHOLS

ANY musical show which has Willie Howard is at least looking in the right direction, even though it does not later choose to follow the first glance. With his wild hair and wilder expressions, the sputter of his accents and his mimicry, he is one of the theatre's best comedians. But even Willie Howard needs some material, and it is this lack which is felt most strongly in "My Dear Public," which opened last evening at the Forty-sixth Street Theatre. Near the end, in a rather pathetic variation of the "Rigoletto" sketch of Howard renown, Willie remarked parenthetically, "All I need is my brother Gene and two more girls." That seemed to be about it.

* * *

The difficulties of "My Dear Public" lie almost entirely with the book, for some of the rest of the show, while not outstanding, possibly would get by on an early autumn evening. But in laying out the words, Irving Caesar—who also produced—and Charles Gottesfeld have avoided wit as though it were a curse and humor as though it were a curse's brother. Their story is of a zipper manufacturer who backs a show, but their evening's entertainment lacks even the sense of a musical plot; apparently it was in the realization of this they label "My Dear Public" a "revusical story." But new words cannot disguise old dullness.

The music is somewhat better. Mr. Caesar, Sam Lerner and Gerald Marks have written several songs which would be able to hold their own amid better company than that in which they find themselves. "Our Private Love Song" and "I Love to Sing the Words" are good popular tunes; "My Spies Tell Me" is good boogie-woogie; and "Color Line," at least as it is done by Rose Brown, is better than average. But such is the lifelessness of the surrounding material that even cheerful music sometimes seems a little lifeless, too.

* * *

Eric Brotherson and Nanette Fabray, Ethel Shutta and Georgie Tapps are there to do most of the singing, and poor David Burns writhes around with the comedy not given to Mr. Howard. Miss Fabray is extremely attractive and has a nice voice, and Mr. Tapps, in addition to singing, is an excellent dancer. Sherle North, who looks like a younger Ruth Gordon, is good in a minor role and the Crandall Sisters are like other trios bobbing up on the radio and musical shows. In designing the dances, Felicia Sorel has not sought the unusual, nor has Lucinda Ballard in cutting the cloth for the costumes nor Albert Johnson in fixing the settings.

Willie Howard deserves much better treatment than "My Dear Public" gives him.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
September 10, 1943

Saved by Howard

By HOWARD BARNES

IRVING CAESAR and Willie Howard share dubious honors for the new musical show, "My Dear Public." The former has written a prodigious number of gags and lyrics for the piece. The latter struggles hard to make them stand up as entertainment. They have worked like beavers on the Forty-sixth Street Theater offering, but they have dammed up very little sustained amusement. When I tell you that the most hilarious interlude in the proceedings is the famous Howard soap-box speech about eating strawberries with cream and liking them, you may get a rough notion of the production's quality.

The truth is that this "revusical story," as it is quaintly called, is a striking example of waste motion on the part of its fabricators and its exponents. Having been tried out unsuccessfully for a year or more, it probably suffers from excessive doctoring. In any case it lacks all the spontaneity, wit and timing that are essential to a song and dance carnival, even when it is called a "revusical." There are a few tolerable songs. There is Georgie Tapps, running through his mannered routines and there is the lovely looking Nanette Fabray in a rather anomalous role. Every one has been willing enough in "My Dear Public," but their efforts have not added up to much.

* * *

For a few moments last night it seemed that the piece might catch fire comically. Howard, playing the part of a zipper manufacturer wheedled into becoming a Broadway impresario against his better judgment, has a set-to with a double-talking author, portrayed to perfection by Al Kelly. The laughter of the situation died aborning and was not revived until the soapbox speech, in which Kelly once more helped out no end. Of course, if you are a rabid Willie Howard fan, his mere presence on the stage virtually all the time may repay you for the dull moments in the production. There were far too many dreary passages for this reviewer.

* * *

The great clown is in there punching all the time. He runs through all sorts of dialects, with his Scotch rendering of the "rewolt" number the highlight of his linguistic antics. He wears a variety of costumes and ad libs when matters grow desperate. There is not enough good material in "Dear Public" for even Howard to get by successfully. Caesar has dashed off a few amusing lyrics and a funny situation or two, but there is no cohesion to the doings. As to the incidental musical comedy trimmings, Felicia Sorel has devised one rather striking ballet to the music of Enesco; Albert Johnson's settings are adequate and Eric Brotherson, Ethel Shutta and David Burns do their best with featured roles. There is no want of trying at the Forty-sixth Street Theater. All that is wanting is an amusing show.

NEW YORK SUN
September 10, 1943

Willie Howard Returns in Routine Musical Show, 'My Dear Public,' at the 46th.

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE theatrical season suffered a relapse last evening when Irving Caesar's production of "My Dear Public" came into the Forty-sixth Street theater. It is just another musical show, and one brought to life only occasionally by Willie Howard, using all the tricks in his bag.

"My Dear Public" has had a turbulent pre-Broadway existence. It opened and closed. Since reopening it has been subjected to considerable travel—and to recasting, rewriting and probably some refinancing, and it is now brought to Broadway quite undecided as to whether it belongs in the revue or musical comedy category. The Playbill calls it a revusical story, and that will give you at least an idea. As revealed last night in 46th Street, Mr. Caesar's production is routine and unexciting.

Now Willie Howard is a funny fellow. He has been so ever since his early Winter Garden days. When he has material, such as he once had in a notable George White "Scandals," he can be the funniest man on the Broadway stage. And even now, when his background is so ponderous an affair as "My Dear Public," he breaks loose. He certainly broke loose with a number called "If You Want a Deal With Russia." By his vitality and his sheer comicality he put it over.

Broaway's Willie, shorn in these years of brother Gene, has played nearly everything in the New York music halls except Cyrano and Jim the Penman and "My Dear Public" presents him in the role of Barney Short, the zipper king, who gets entangled in show business. Barney's adventures in the world of the drama give this new show its revusical start.

Besides Willie Howard, the new production has assets in the dancing Georgie Tapps; in the colored singer, Rose Brown, and in the pert and pretty Nanette Fabray. Miss Fabray has come along since her Broadway debut in "Meet the People," and if she failed to sparkle last night don't give up on her. She will get better. She went into the production only recently and her material isn't particularly good. Eric Brotherson, who was tremendously funny with Gertrude Lawrence in "Lady in the Dark," is rather lost in "My Dear Public."

The book of "My Dear Public" is second rate and the experienced Edgar MacGregor, who did the staging, probably knew it—and knows it. There are several attractive chorus routines and a few pretty dancers in the ensemble. Among the principals you find David Burns, to be remembered from "The Man Who Came to Dinner," and the double-talking Al Kelly, who now obliges with his specialty.

Irving Caesar has had great patience and perseverance with "My Dear Public" and he has worked hard to make a Broadway show of it. But it is still not a good show and I doubt if it ever will be.

"Laugh Time"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
September 9, 1943

'Laugh Time' Gets Name From Bert Wheeler and Frank Fay

By JOHN CHAPMAN

EVERY time a variety show that is pretty good comes along people begin to exult that vaudeville isn't dead, and then they begin to moon about the old days at the Palace, which frequently were terrible. It wasn't vaudeville that died—it was the audiences. Give a trouper a live audience and he rises like a trout to a bucktail fly. Last night's first audience at "Laugh Time" was alive, so Bert Wheeler, Frank Fay and I had a fine time.

"Laugh Time," which is housed at the Shubert Theatre, is latter-day vaudeville; the sort they used to have just before audiences died, in which a master of ceremonies works all through the show. In this case there are two m.c.'s, Fay and Wheeler, introducing standard variety acts. For good measure there is Ethel Waters.

The Boys Are Casual

Maybe you've got to learn to like Wheeler and Fay, like pickled eel or fried octopus. Once you like 'em, they and you are all set. Frank Fay is no fast-punching wit like Fred Allen. He is slow and casual and makes an art of throwing away lines. Bert Wheeler is a homey little cuss who talks to you as though you'd known each other a long time, and he never strains for a point. He comes on in a dressing gown and a silk hat and between bites of a dry bread sandwich he gabbles small talk about other people in the troupe, and he gets you.

When Wheeler and Fay work together they do nothing astonishing. They just feel their way along, sensing the tempo of the customers and indulging in gentle insult. When the customers pick up speed they pick it up, too, and their act is a demonstration of the most difficult of all vaudeville tricks, timing.

In the "Laugh Time" troupe, which Paul Small and Fred Finklehoffe assembled on the West Coast, are The Bricklayers, the dog act everybody must know by now; Adriana and Charly, a very able trampoline team; the dusky Buck and Bubbles, doing the familiar old song-and-dance number; the Di Gatanos, a ballroom pair who are okay; some apache dancers and one or two other acts.

Miss Waters Goes Arty

Ethel Waters had last night's patrons, including a flock of standees, applauding mightily. I wish I could have done same, for I've admired her greatly since the "Heat Wave" and "Stormy Weather" days. But it seems to me that now she is as full of tricks as a Broadway magic shop, and I wish she'd sing her songs straight the way she used to.

Last night's opening took place under what the management thought were grave difficulties—for the scenery hadn't arrived from the West. According to a note written by the show's historian, Richard Maney, the scenery was to have been "a fusion of Taj Mahal, Josef Urban, the Grand Canyon and early Loew's State." I don't think many of the parishioners ever noticed there wasn't any scenery.

Final note: The orchestra is conducted by Lou Forman, who was the Toscanini of the Palace, the Koussevitzky of the two-a-day.

Extra final note: "Laugh Time" is vaudeville—but the prices are a damn sight higher.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
September 9, 1943

Laugh Time Opens at the Shubert—Good Old Vaudeville at Its Best

By BURTON RASCOE

VAUDEVILLE, in the best tradition, is back on Broadway under the title, Laugh Time, presented by Paul Small and Fred Finklehoff at the Shubert's last night. The stars are Frank Fay, Ethel Waters and Bert Wheeler, Mr. Fay acts as master of ceremonies during the first half of the show and Mr. Wheeler during the last half, but their comic gears mesh so smoothly that their contributions amount to that of a team.

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Here's the Bill

The bill is as follows:

Adriana and Charly—They are a pair of acrobats, tumblers and equilibrists who repeatedly do one stunt that is absolutely, positively impossible. Charly bounces high on a taut web of netting, projects himself forward, landing with his outstretched palms on the uplifted palms of Adriana, and stays balanced there. I saw them do this with my own eyes . . . I don't believe it.

Buck and Bubbles—A colored team of boogie-woogie singers and dancers, very popular with last night's audience. You have seen them in the movies.

Jane and Adam di Gatano—Ballroom dancers and very good, but their turn is more acrobatic than terpsichorean.

The Bricklayers—These are those amazing dogs you have probably already seen in the movies, whose act is that of constructing an apartment building—and going for frequent drinks at a nearby saloon.

Ethel Waters—She sings Stormy Weather, Cabin in the Sky, and a medley of the songs that made her famous on the radio. Her loyal fans in the audience were vociferous. She sang one number which, since it was the only off-color thing in the show last night (except one poor gag by Mr. Wheeler, which froze) she might hereafter save for stag nights.

Lucienne and Ashour—Apache dancers, who have an amusing variation of this old standby—the girl whams the hell out of her tough sweetheart.

Jerri Vance and Warren Jackson—They hadn't come on when I had to leave, as it was getting close on to midnight.

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Comedy Dominates

Frank Fay and Bert Wheeler dominate the show with their comic skits and banter. Mr. Wheeler is in his familiar role as the duffer comedian who gets shoved around without getting a chance to show how funny he is, but seizes an opportunity when he is alone to spill the dirt about what is going on backstage.

Mr. Fay was in his best form last night and that is very excellent monologue form indeed. He has a pleasing personality, a genuine wit, a perfect sense of timing and good mimetic gifts. His specialty is the humor of anti-climax, which is a form of comedy that requires high technical precision to be effective. And he is expert at it. At times he had me laughing so hard my sides ached. If you get to the show, stay long enough to see his take-off on John Charles Thomas and hear his analyses of the lyrics of various popular songs, even if you have to miss your train.

If you have been yapping or moaning for the return of vaudeville, here it is—about as good a vaudeville bill as you ever saw, no matter how old you are.

NEW YORK POST
September 9, 1943

Frank Fay, Bert Wheeler and Ethel Waters in Laugh Time

By WILELLA WALDORF

"LAUGH TIME" sounds like a dangerous title to attach to a variety show, but the Messrs. Small and Finklehoffe, who gave us "Show Time" a season ago, took the risk last night at the Shubert Theatre.

The funny part of it is, we were laughing most of the time, at Frank Fay, at Bert Wheeler, and at Fay and Wheeler, especially Fay.

To hear Frank Fay talk, you gather he's been a trouper since just after the War of 1812, yet we can't recall him very well. Of course he's been around, but for some reason or other he's escaped us for years. And he's not only very comical at talking about next to nothing, but one of the few masters of ceremony that we have ever actually enjoyed, not merely tolerated.

Bert Wheeler is a bit more familiar, and so are most of his jokes. Old jokes, however, are always dug up and given an injection of nitro-glycerine during these latter-day vaudeville shows and most of them are as acceptable as the old songs everybody sings.

By the time Fay got around to his "specialty" last night sometime after 11, he remarked that nearly every song that was ever written had been sung during the evening. It didn't matter, though, for Fay himself, though he seems to have a pretty good voice if he cared to use it, doesn't go in for singing songs. He dissects them, and very amusingly, too.

Ethel Waters, still wrinkling up her eyes and smiling that wide toothy smile, was the third star of the evening, singing a medley of songs she's introduced and one or two newer ones. As always, she lent distinction to the performance, which also included that by now hauntingly familiar but always engaging dog act, The Bricklayers; some fancy twirling by Jane and Adam Di Gatano; Buck and Bubbles, the colored pair up to their customary antics, an Apache number by Lucienne and Ashour and acrobatics by Adriana and Charly.

Scenery Lost En Route

"Laugh Time" is an informal show, with Fay and Wheeler dreamily sweeping up the stage now and then, and complaining about the management. It was probably a bit more informal even than originally planned since the scenery never turned up. It's still en route from California. The company made the Coast-to-Coast jump in time but the Bricklayers were the only ones lucky enough to bring on their trappings intact.

A notice handed out with the program read: "Our scenery, in case anyone cares, was last heard of somewhere between Las Vegas, N. M., and LaPorte, Ind. En route from Los Angeles, we fear it has met with foul play.

"Want to hear more about our scenery? No? Well, you're going to. It was and is, for all we know a fusion of the best features of the Taj Mahal, the late Joseph Urban, the Grand Canyon and early Loew's State. At a later date we may give a special showing of it to satisfy non-believers.

"In our extremity we have whipped up such velvet, velour and lumber as was available at the nearest salvage piles. If it is a little on the ersatz side we know, in your vast tolerance, you'll understand. The show, as some dope once illogically remarked, must go on."

It went on, too. Somehow you don't miss scenery if the laughs are there.

"Laugh Time"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
September 9, 1943

A Very Nice One-Man Show

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

VAUDEVILLE came back to town last night and, thanks to Frank Fay, is in good standing this morning. *Laugh Time*, in brief, is pretty much of a one-man show. In all fairness, Bert Wheeler should be credited with a generous assist, but it is Fay, a suave, resourceful, immensely fetching master of ceremonies who puts the wind into *Laugh Time's* sails. From the moment he comes on and announces he's been out with a newspaper woman—yes, she keeps a stand—till he winds up doing his own act and tears the lyrics of *Tea for Two* apart, he is a pleasure to watch and a joy to listen to. Unlike most of the boys—even the good ones—who dally before the curtain, he is seldom brassy and seldom coy. His timing is excellent; his underplaying is admirable, so that when he does come straight at you, you're entirely receptive. Much of his patter is at the expense of the producers and Brother Wheeler, a stunt that never fails when done well, and last night it was done well.

Bert Wheeler has remarks to make about the producers, too, and about Fay, and goes through the famous sandwich act—all of it likeable and helpful and some of it funny. But somehow it's not in the same class. The show needs a second comic, however, and Bert Wheeler fills the bill very nicely.

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For the rest, *Laugh Time* is often agreeable enough but never very striking. Ethel Waters runs pleasantly through *Stormy Weather*, *Heat Wave*, *Taking a Chance on Love* and other Waters specialties, but with little of her old excitement and less than her usual appeal. Buck and Bubbles have, as always, an engaging quality about them, but they offer nothing new. The Bricklayers remains the best dog act of our time, but even the best dogs have their day, and these little fellows have been turning up too often. Adriana and Charly do some nice acrobatics, Lucienne and Ashour offer their familiar Apache act, and the Di Gatanos contribute the required ballroom dancing.

But it's Fay's show, and he makes it a good one.

'LAUGH TIME'

Variety show, presented by Paul Small and Fred Finklehoffe at the Shubert Theater, Wednesday evening, September 8, 1943, with cast including Frank Fay, Ethel Waters, Bert Wheeler, Jane and Adam Di Gatano, Buck and Bubbles, Adriana and Charly, Lucienne and Ashour, Jerri Vance, Warren Jackson and the Bricklayers. Orchestra under the direction of Lou Forman.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
September 9, 1943

Almost the Palace

By HOWARD BARNES

THAT old phoenix, vaudeville, has risen from its ashes again. In its newest manifestation, a show called "Laugh Time," it is curiously like the two-a-day I knew when I was in knee pants. It also bears the striking resemblance to entertainments which have flitted in and out of night clubs in recent years. If a group of variety acts makes a show, that is what you will find at the Shubert. At least the acts are superior.

For "Laugh Time" has assembled considerable talent in its random continuity. Frank Fay is on hand to bring back memories of the old Palace and demonstrate that the most indigenous American humor is based on insult. Bert Wheeler is his foil during most of the give and take in the offering. Fay could take all comers. When he is building a gag slowly from no beginning to no ending, "Laugh Time" is genuine vaudeville. He is something more than master of ceremonies in this latest theatrical excursion into variety. He lends distinction to a helter-skelter revue.

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It is only a pity that Fay could not have been made the center of something more exciting than the formalized variety routine. As it is, you will find an excellent animal act, The Bricklayers, in which a group of dogs show up their trainer in no uncertain fashion; Ethel Waters, singing a group of songs which have made her justly famous; Buck and Bubbles clowning and dancing around a piano, and a couple of dance acts. Each number is first rate in its particular field. What is wanting is the timing and the anticipation of something new and wonderful that made vaudeville the great popular medium of its era.

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The producers of "Laugh Time," Paul Small and Fred Finklehoffe, apologized last night for the lack of scenery, which, it seems "was last heard of somewhere between Las Vegas, N. M., and Laporte, Ind." As I remember vaudeville in its heyday it never needed pretentious window dressing. "Laugh Time" does not suffer from lack of props. It is quite as good as any show that ever had to cope with the limitations of a night-club dance floor. With Faye on stage, it almost succeeds in making vaudeville live again, as we once knew it. In any case, there are a lot of top-notch performers at the Shubert.

NEW YORK SUN
September 9, 1943

Frank Fay and Bert Wheeler Very Funny in New Variety Show, 'Laugh Time'

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE Sam S. Shubert Theater, an institution in 44th street, that has had everything from Al Jolson to Forbes-Robertson's Hamlet, has now become the home of a vaudeville show that brings back memories of Monday afternoons at the old Palace. They call this new show "Laugh Time"—and it's excellent.

There are only a few people concerned, but the majority of them are first rate. "Laugh Time" is in the tradition of its predecessor, "Show Time" and, to my notion, it is better. It puts Ethel Waters of the rolling eyes, exuberant smile and resonant voice back to work and it brings along two of the theater's funniest men, Frank Fay and Bert Wheeler. Both return at the top of their form. "Laugh Time" is definitely a hit on the basis of its first performance.

Paul Small and Fred Finklehoffe are the producers. They tried this show first in Sacramento, moved it on to San Francisco, and then to Los Angeles. And it had its premiere performance last evening before the best-humored audience of the season to date.

Frank Fay, droll, dry, wry and quiet, has been a fellow of bantering ways in numerous Broadway productions. He used to be a tremendous favorite at the revered Palace, but has been seen infrequently in recent years. Now he teams up with the comical and befuddled Bert Wheeler, who gives his best performance since he worked for the master, Mr. Ziegfeld, in "Rio Rita." A lot of stuff which Fay and Wheeler do together is hilarious.

Ethel Waters is a figure of great force and vitality in the New York theater, whether she is playing in "As Thousands Cheer" or "Mamba's Daughters." She is again up to her old show-stopping tricks as she sings her favorites—"Cabin in the Sky," "Stormy Weather," "Am I Blue" and "Heat Wave." The show also brings forth the colored comedians, Buck and Bubbles; a beautiful dancing team in Jane and Adam Di Gatano, and gives us another presentation of that remarkable dog act, the Bricklayers.

It's a vaudeville bill all the way and one on which Fay and Wheeler do most of the work, and I thought they both quite surpassed themselves. It's a show, too, that can stand some speeding up here and there. This will surely be done. The scenery for the production seems to have gone astray the other side of the Wabash and the management issues an explanatory note (which could only have been written by R. Maney), but the absence of scenery doesn't appear to matter.

What does matter is that both Fay and Wheeler are present and very funny, and I expect "Laugh Time" to bring further stampedes to Forty-fourth street, a thoroughfare that is already booming.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
September 9, 1943

Frank Fay, Ethel Waters, Bert Wheeler Head New Vaudeville Show

By ROBERT GARLAND

WHAT can you say about a vaudeville show, after you've said it's good? The answer is, "very little." So let me tell you that the vaudeville show that came last night to the Shubert, is good. As a matter of truth telling, it's excellent. Even without its scenery which, on its way east from California, got mislaid somewhere between Las Vegas, N. M., and La Porte, Ind., it is a vaudeville show well worth seeing.

At the head of it is Ethel Waters, that great lady of the theatre. Miss Waters, accompanied on the piano by the Reginald Beane who could not be improved upon, sings half a dozen familiar numbers, including "Here I Go Again"—or whatever it is called!—from "Cabin in the Sky." I have never seen or heard Miss Waters in a more unbecoming gown or finer fettle. As far as I'm concerned, she is the outstanding hit of "Laugh Time."

Fay Excellent

As for Frank Fay, he is just as frank and just as fay as usual. Even more so! And, being frank and being fay, he makes an excellent master-of-ceremonies. Nowadays, if you close your eyes at the Shubert, you'll think you're back at the Palace in good old vaudeville days. And when, after the intermission, Frank does what is still known as "his specialty," you'll know you are. It's wonderful, hearing "Tea For Two" once more torn practically to pieces.

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Bert Wheeler is also among those present, still munching on a sandwich, still a forthright funny man. Gossiping about Frank Fay and the other members of his company, he is his old self again, even if he leaves Mr. Fay no legitimate leg to stand on. They make a diverting team, these two. Playing into each other's hands, they manage to bring vaudeville back to life, filling the Shubert Theatre with honest laughter and high good spirits.

Reading an advance copy of my friend's—and co-worker's—"Theatre Book of the Year," I find that George Jean Nathan doesn't care for dog actors. He just can't bear them. Well, I can! I not only can bear dog acts, I actually admire them. Especially "The Bricklayers," which are part and parcel of the vaudeville show at the Shubert. Last night they were not quite up to their erstwhile standing, but they were amazing, just the same. I wish George would take another look at them.

Surrounding these four—Miss Waters, Mr. Fay, Mr. Wheeler and The Bricklayers—are Buck and Bubbles in topmost form, Jane and Adam Di Gatano, smooth and lovely ballroom dancers, the Apache dance of Lucienne and Ashour, in which his lady is the tough one, Adriana and Charly, Jerri Vance and Warren Jackson. And, if these were not enough to make the Shubert Theatre seem like the Palace-that-used-to-be, who do you think conducts the "Laugh Time" orchestra. You're right, Lou Forman.

"Laugh Time"

NEW YORK TIMES
September 9, 1943

Vaudeville Comes Back

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THAT curiously lively corpse, vaudeville, is up and around again, dancing on the stage of the Shubert and making theatre-going a satisfaction once more. Credit Paul Small and Fred Finklehoffe, who seem to have taken over most of the duties of the old Palace, with building up "Laugh Time" and bringing it on from the Coast. Credit too, and as no afterthought, Ethel Waters, Frank Fay, Bert Wheeler and the others for a vaudeville bill that is varied and funny, with not too much of anything and with a good deal deserving endless encores. The Messrs. Small and Finkelhoff are in the business now, so probably later on they will provide more. O.K.

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Any theatrical season that finds Miss Waters in the Forties naturally is a great season. She has not changed out there where they make pictures—and assemble vaudeville bills. The jewels still sparkle, and the teeth, and the Waters voice breaks confidingly as she proves that happiness is a name called Joe. Last evening, as presumably she will this, she went down the line of the songs—"Taking a Chance on Love," "Heat Wave," "Cabin in the Sky" and "Stormy Weather" among them. There is no doubt that she could be singing at this minute, while the cleaning women waited the departure of a full audience, had she wished; happiness in vaudeville is a name called Ethel.

Frank Fay and Bert Wheeler, individually and together, are not up on the stage to detract from the bill either. Being hungrier on this occasion, Mr. Wheeler is nibbling a sandwich instead of an apple, but he still is hoping the audience will send its friends to the show, since he gets 10 per cent of the gross over $32,000 a week. Mr. Fay is quiet. He went to a night club the other night, he said, with a newspaper woman; (pause) she has a stand. Vaudeville used to be like that in the old days, and Mr. Fay can go on with great cheer until the end of the evening, when he volunteers to sing either of the two songs not already used in the show. The two comedians are a fine couple.

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Those are just the stars, but "Laugh Time" is prepared to offer a good deal more. For the intellect there are Buck and Bubbles, the dancing, singing, playing dervishes from Harlem; for dancing—sacred, profane and apache—there are Jane and Adam Di Gatano and Lucienne and Ashour; for tumbling, Adriana and Charly. Finally, since every vaudeville show has one animal act, "Laugh Time" has acquired what New York must by now regard as the best in the business. This is "The Bricklayers," the aggregation of dogs which are as human as vaudeville itself.

"Blossom Time"

NEW YORK POST
September 7, 1943

'Blossom Time' Revived at the Ambassador Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

EVER since "White Lilacs" we have been a trifle wary of operettas based on the lives, loves and music of great composers. "White Lilacs" concerned Chopin and in it Mme. George Sand swept down a long staircase smoking a cigar and singing "Oh, To Be Kissed by Chopin or Liszt."

"Blossom Time," however, is reputedly the best and certainly the most popular of all the musicals whose heroes are great musicians. It has been going on somewhere most of the time since it was originally produced back in 1921 and nearly everybody loves the melodies of Franz Schubert "adapted and augmented," as the program has it, by Sigmund Romberg.

The Messrs. Shubert—no relation to Franz—revived the old work once again last Saturday night at the Ambassador Theatre. The story still concerns Schubert's love for Mitzi Krans, daughter of the court jeweler, and his shyness in pressing his suit.

Leans on Schubert

"Blossom Time" leans very heavily upon Schubert's melodious songs for its appeal. Dramatically it is stilted and the current version does not help matters by lining up the principals in threes, fours, fives or sixes as often as possible and having them pace up and down before the footlights in time to the music. In a generally muscle-bound production, only the comedians exhibit any freedom of movement. They are given considerable latitude to roam about the stage at will.

The score of "Blossom Time" may be roughly divided into three parts: 1. Schubert. 2. Schubert diluted with Romberg, and 3. pure Romberg.

The various presentations of the work that we happen to have encountered have all had the same trouble. The singers playing the leading roles are able to cope adequately with Romberg and to some extent with Schubert-Romberg, but their interpretations of Schubert leave much to be desired.

This is hardly surprising. Concert singers invariably devote many years to acquiring the style of German lieder. One hardly expects to find Town Hall technique on Broadway, but it is nevertheless a fairly depressing sensation to hear "Ungeduld" dealt with as if it were a hit song from "The New Moon."

The overwhelming majority of last Saturday evening's audience, however, was not inclined to be so fussy. It applauded both Schubert and Romberg with abandon, and we should have been convinced the customers were all music lovers starved for melody except for the fact that the response was just as vociferous when Doug Leavitt, after drinking too much wine, scratched the table's leg instead of his own and ejaculated: "My God! I'm dead."

Heavy Comedy

The "Blossom Time" book contains a choice selection of senile jokes and gags, and some that it did not contain have apparently been exhumed for the present occasion by Mr. Leavitt, who is adept at making faces and indulging in bits of comic pantomime while the plot is going forward elsewhere on the stage. At one point in the second act he was joined by Harry K. Morton, who had nothing to do with the play, but who spent what seemed like several hours making funny noises and stumping across the stage on his heels like a mechanical doll.

Possibly Mr. Morton's act was somewhat elongated when the "Ballet a la Degas" featuring Monna Montes, though duly heralded in the program, never put in an appearance.

Alexander Gray is the current Franz Schubert, mild, meek and musical, and equipped with the customary fuzzy wig and spectacles. Roy Cropper as Baron Schober lifts his voice to some effect now and then and so do Roy Barnes as Vogel, and Barbara Scully, the youthful and attractive Mitzi. Helene Arthur plays the jealous opera singer, La Bellabruna, with Robert Chisholm as her suspicious husband.

The scenic investiture may be described as early Shubert (no "c" there, printer) and the orchestral effects were of little help to the singers. In sum, a routine revival of an old favorite got up for the Broadway war boom trade at a top price of $2.75.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
September 7, 1943

'Blossom Time' Opens At the Ambassador

By ROBERT GARLAND

SEPARATED by a single block off Broadway, Franz Schubert, the celebrated Viennese composer, and Jecter Lester, the celebrated Georgia cracker, returned to town during the Labor Day week-end. Each, after his fashion, received a robust welcome as each, after his fashion, went through his regular routine. Age has not withered, nor custom staled, their infinite appeal at the box-office. In the showshop, you just can't keep a good corny character down.

After almost three decades of wandering—here, there, everywhere; from Vienna, the city in which in 1914, it had its world premiere, to New York; from Maine to California; from South Africa to China; from Holland to New Zealand—"Blossom Time" is right back where it started in Manhattan. That is, at the Ambassador Theatre. There, on a September evening in 1921, it had its first New York showing. Four, maybe five, showings have been ventured locally since that time.

Warm Reception

Saturday night's venture is neither the best nor the worst of the metropolitan resuscitations. At any rate, there was an overflowing audience to greet its return to Broadway, with an admiring gentleman in his shirt-sleeves decorating a box on the lower floor, an admiring gentleman named Sigmund Romberg—with his coat on!—decorating the balcony and much genuinely appreciative applause from the top to the bottom of the theatre. "Blossom Time" could be certain of its welcome!

Frankly, I can never understand how the composer of, say, "The Unfinished Symphony" could have been the sentimental sap "Blossom Time" makes him out to be. No matter who projects him—be it the Bertram Peacock of the original American production, or the Greek Evans, the Knight MeGregor, the John Charles Gilbert or the Everett Marshall who followed from year to year—Franz Schubert turns out to be a misty, if music-minded, moron. It just couldn't be! It wasn't!

Pleasant Tunes

The fault, I am sure, is in the libretto, not the stars. For, at the Ambassador, the Franz Schubert of "Blossom Time" remains his old corny self in the hands of Alexander Gray. Even pronouncing his last name "Shubert"—as if he were kin to Mr. Lee and Mr. Jake who own the show—doesn't help matters a great deal. He continues to give away his girl, his songs, his symphonies and his character to the first person who asks for them. And it must be the librettists who are responsible.

As for the current cast, that is persistently operetta-ish. Barbara Scully, right out of the "Student Prince" into "Blossom Time," is lovely and melodious as Mitzi. After 22 years, Roy Cropper is dealing with Baron Schober instead of Vogel. Helene Arthur is an expansive Bellabruna. And Harry Morton and Doug Leavitt contrive to get off the old one about "marriage being an institution" between them. Tunes, jokes and backgrounds are all pleasantly familiar. Especially the tunes.

"Blossom Time"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
September 6, 1943

'Blossom Time' Returns to Theatre Where It Opened

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"BLOSSOM TIME" opened at the Ambassador Theatre last Saturday night and is still running. Period.

. . . The foregoing really is all that is needed for a notice, because "Blossom Time" is money in the bank for the producers and for the customers who want to see it.

Most customers, I think, won't mind seeing it. Many will be viewing it for the second, fourth or dozenth time, for the first New York performance of the Franz Schubert operetta was given about 22 years ago. There no doubt is a whole new set of youngsters who have never heard it at all. The oldsters and the youngsters should have an equally pleasant evening at the Ambassador, for the current "Blossom Time" is strictly standard.

It isn't sleazy, as it could have been. The costumes are clean and the girls are pretty and the orchestra dabbles around in the Unfinished Symphony and other numbers with sufficient, if not extraordinary, skill.

Good Book, Good Music

There are two things which make "Blossom Time" a sure bet in the theatre—the music and the book. If you can add to these an occasional pretty face and a good tenor and soprano, you have a show.

The music, being Schubert's in the beginning, is much, much more than adequate. Melody flows. With Sigmund Romberg orchestration and Dorothy Donnelly lyrics, "Song of Love," "Serenade," "Tell Me Daisy," "Lonely Heart" and the other numbers are still hits. Gentle hits, if you will, with no boogie-woogie or Sinatra Apassionhita in them, but hits.

The book stands up much better than most any last year's musical comedy plot, because it is simple, like the Schubert music. It is standard. It has a little romance, a little comedy and a little heartbreak.

Cast Knows Its Stuff

The players in this latest of revivals are quite acceptable. Barbara Scully, who plays the girl who carries the torch for Schubert, is pert and pleasant and possessed of a firm soprano voice. Alexander Gray, as Franz Schubert, wears Ben Franklin glasses and a befuddled air and acts exactly the way you think Schubert must have acted; and he sings all right. Others in the company are Roy Cropper, who was in the original "Blossom Time" and still is making with the high notes; Doug Leavitt, a practical mugging comedian from a long way back, and Robert Chisholm, who sang "Blossom Time" in Australia.

"Blossom Time" was first produced in Vienna in 1914 and is one of the earliest examples of swiping tunes from the musical giants of the Nineteenth Century. It was given its first New York performance in 1921—at the Ambassador, where it is playing now. For a while two companies of the operetta were playing on Broadway . . . and if "Blossom Time" could have had two companies running "Oklahoma" can have three.

'BLOSSOM TIME'

Operetta in three acts; book and lyrics adapted by Dorothy Donnelly; music adapted by Sigmund Romberg from the melodies of Franz Schubert and H. Berte; settings by Watson Barratt; choreography by Carnay; direction by J. J. Shubert; presented by the Shuberts at the Ambassador Theater Saturday, September 4, 1943. The cast:

Franz Schubert	Alexander Gray
Christian Kranz	Doug Leavitt
Baron Schober	Roy Cropper
Scharntoff	Robert Chisholm
Mitzi	Barbara Scully
Fritzi	Adelaide Bishop
Kitzi	Loraine Manners
Bellabruna	Helene Arthur
Flower Girl	Helen Thompson
Mrs. Kranz	Zella Russell
Maid, Greta	Jacqueline Susann
Maid, Rosie	Helena LeBerthon
Mrs. Coburg	Pamela Dow
Vogel	Roy Barnes
Von Schwindt	George Mitchell
Kuppelweiser	Nord. Cornell
Novotny	Harry K. Morton
Domeyer	Walter Johnson
Erkman	George Beach
Binder	John O'Neill
Waitress	Alice Drake
Waiter	Walter Johnson
Prima Ballerina	Monna Montes

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
September 6, 1943

Now 'Blossom Time'

By HOWARD BARNES

WHAT with the current boom in love arias and drinking songs, it is not surprising to find the Shuberts dusting off "Blossom Time." It is a hasty job that has been done on the venerable operetta. The libretto is even more ho! ho! ho! and bosom clutching than I had remembered from other productions of the show. The incidental comedy is extremely hard to take, while the general production could have stood a great deal more polishing. Fortunately, the music is still as lovely as ever.

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What is more, the new Ambassador offering gives it something of an even break. Alexander Gray and Barbara Scully sing the chief roles with fervor and considerable eloquence. Roy Cropper, who was in the original production of "Blossom Time" here in 1921, is splendid, particularly in the male quintet with violin obligato, "Serenade", and Helene Arthur adds to the melodic felicity as Bellabruna. There are times the orchestra and the principals do not see eye to eye, but, on the whole, the vocalizing is all right.

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The company has songs to sing. The Franz Schubert melodies, in their various adaptations by H. Berte and Sigmund Romberg, are the very stuff of light opera. There was scarcely a number Saturday evening that did not have an encore, with "Melody Triste," "Song of Love" and "Lonely Heart" leading the field. The dramatic background to the songfest leaves almost everything to be desired.

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There are one or two scenes in which Cropper and Miss Scully hint that they are the great composer Franz Schubert and the Mitzi with whom he became involved in an unhappy romance. Most of the straight stage doings at the Ambassador are embarrassing. Doug Leavitt's clowning is of the drawing-room prankster variety and Harry K. Morton collaborates with him in a really embarrassing exchange of quips and random antics. "Blossom Time" has some wonderful songs and they are handled rather adequately in this revival. You will find nothing else to demand your attention.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
September 7, 1943

Music Hath Charms, But Its Charms Have Limits

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

AFTER 20-odd years, and God knows how many road tours, there is not much left of *Blossom Time*. The wonderful Schubert melodies are still there, though a trifle spoiled by Romberg sugar; otherwise the operetta is distinctly dated. The sentimental plot, the foolish dialogue, the desperate comedy could never have contributed notably to *Blossom Time's* success; but where they were once merely what you expected, today they are worse than you feared.

All the same, these familiar blemishes of operetta need not be fatal ones; one doesn't go to things like *Blossom Time* to be overwhelmed by the story or convulsed by the jokes. What any operetta in revival needs, and can generally win out on, is a first-rate production. *The Merry Widow* is a smash hit at this very moment because it got one—because, under Robert Stolz, its melodies are played with real warmth and zip; because, thanks to George Balanchine, its dances are charming and fresh; because, in a word, the whole thing has color and style. *The Merry Widow* is not only proof that an operetta can be glowingly revived, but a model of how to revive it.

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The Shuberts, however, have put their faith in Model T. They have given *Blossom Time* a slip-shod, hit-or-miss production that accentuates all its shortcomings. There is no charm, no color, no style. So far as I could discover, the only concession they have made to 1943 is a crack about the meat shortage. That is not, I'm afraid, quite enough. It doesn't add oomph to the costumes and sets, or brilliance to the orchestra. It doesn't make the acting any less stiff or the clowning any less heavy. And it certainly doesn't exonerate the dancing, which I find it hard to describe: a group of young ladies execute—not all at the same time—a series of "steps"; or whirl a bit, not without occasionally bumping into one another.

The singing, though well below what a first-rate production would call for, is on the whole the most dependable part of *Blossom Time*. Alexander Gray as Schubert, and Barbara Scully as a very pretty Mitzi, do pleasantly by *Song of Love* and their other numbers; and Helene Arthur, Roy Cropper and others turn in agreeable performances also. But *Blossom Time*, today, needs a little more than that.

NEW YORK TIMES
September 6, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
'Blossom Time'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"BLOSSOM TIME" is one of the theatre's wanderers, spending fat and contented seasons touring along the road and only occasionally coming home to Broadway. Last Saturday evening the Messrs. Shubert brought it to the Ambassador, and as the story of the love affair of Franz Schubert ambled on its way, it again seemed certain that the operetta and Broadway no longer are marching side by side. Grant "Blossom Time" its melodies, but it also has one of the dreariest books in the world, and in this particular instance at least it suffers a production which adds neither sparkle nor luster.

It is the comedy of "Blossom Time" which approachpes the frightful; its humors are heavy-handed and dull, and its passages become dreary waits between the songs, waits which seem to lengthen as the acts pass by. The comedy lacks both wit and the charm which can be found in some of the other period operettas, and it would take a great man indeed to play Christian Kranz—the chief comedy role—so that it seems like anything approaching 1943. Doug Leavitt works at it in this revival, works hard and is better than some of his predecessors, but still far from perfection.

Alexander Gray plays the Schubert role and Barbara Scully—who came over from "The Student Prince"—is Mitzi, the young girl with whom the composer is in love. Roy Cropper, familiar to Gilbert and Sullivan and to operetta, including the seventy-eight weeks of the first run of "Blossom Time," is a clear-singing Baron Schober, and Robert Chisholm is Scharntoff. The producers have provided a large orchestra in tribute to the melodies, but have not carried over their good intentions to the costumes and scenery. "Blossom Time" does not rank with the good revivals of this season of musical revivals.

"Blossom Time"

NEW YORK SUN
September 7, 1943

'Blossom Time,' Ever-recurrent, Restored to Broadway by the Shuberts

By WARD MOREHOUSE

"BLOSSOM TIME," one of the American theater's standard commodities—and proven successes—is back in town again, back with its lovely music, a serviceable company and a production that has the stock-company look. The melodies are still there, but I find the book quite as steadily wearisome as it was when this piece was first shown to Broadway, a matter of more than two decades ago.

There is, definitely, a mass public for "Blossom Time." It is an operetta as well known in Wichita and Denver, in Tucson and Butte, as in the Broadway area. It has established itself as one of our ever-recurrent stage productions, along with "The Red Mill" and "Babes in Toyland." And I applaud and thoroughly approve of the scheme of restoring near-classics to a New York stage fairly clamoring for more plays.

But—and now don't be fretful with me, Mr. Shubert—the "Blossom Time" of 1943 at the Ambassador Theater gives every appearance of having been carelessly put together. It suggests a Poli or Baldwin-Melville stock producing company, having to bring along a new play every week. For its Broadway reappearance it should have been tricked up with better scenery and costumes. Also, a few more attractive people would have been helpful.

This new "Blossom Time" brings back Franz Schubert music, known from the Orange Mountains to the Sierras. It is now played and sung by an experienced but never an inspired company, whose personnel includes Alexander Gray, Roy Cropper, Doug Leavitt, Robert Chisholm, Harry K. Morton, Zella Russell and Barbara Scully. Miss Scully, in the role of Mitzi, is pleasantly vocal and decorative and occasionally brings to mind Joan Roberts of the rampant "Oklahoma." Mr. Gray and Mr. Cropper, both of whom know their way about an operetta stage, perform valiantly, and Doug Leavitt quite exhausts himself trying to wring comedy from the role of Christian Kranz. Several performers give the impression that they haven't been inside a theater or on a stage since Gus Hill was sending his road troupes to the one-nighters of the land.

Anyway, "Blossom Time" has returned and 49th street seems its old self again. Broadway is booming and perhaps there is a place for this famous operetta, even though rendered in second-best style. With this production duly installed at the Ambassador the Shuberts could now turn to "The Chocolate Soldier," Or "Alma, Where Do You Live?" Or even "Katinka."

That was also a hit.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
September 7, 1943

Barbara Scully's Beauty and Voice Add Needed Graces to Operetta

By BURTON RASCOE

NO music show in which Barbara Scully appears can be without one conspicuous merit. And Miss Scully not only adorns the Shubert revival of Blossom Time, which opened last Saturday night at the Ambassador, but also sings in 10 of the 17 musical numbers, including four duets and one trio. At Miss Scully's birth the good fairies were in a prodigal mood; they showered her with every gift a future operetta star could wish for—beauty, grace, sweetness in her glance, vitality, the instincts and perceptions of a born actress, and a voice that is at once melodious and incredibly powerful in so slight a body.

It was in Blossom Time that Miss Scully got her first opportunity to appear in a music show. Less than two years after her graduation from high school in Detroit, she was entrusted with the role of Mitzi while the company was on tour. She was switched to the role of Kathie in The Student Prince when it opened in New York and she had been singing that part until Saturday night.

I hope Miss Scully is happy over the change. I am not. Blossom Time is one operetta to whose charms I am, and always have been, almost completely anesthetic. The music in it, as sheer music, leaves me listless and unmoved. Except for the Schubert piece from which the tune of The Big Bad Wolf was lifted, which is woven into the overture to the second act, I find no melody in Blossom Time that is simple, surprising and catchy enough to linger in my memory. It seems to me that Sigmund Romberg, who did magnificently by the score for The Student Prince, failed in his inspiration for this operetta.

* * *

Musical Great Success

But what am I against so many? Blossom Time is one of the most successful operettas in the history of the theater.

Two things occurred Saturday night which mitigated so much against a wholly acceptible performance that the demand for encores was slight—so slight that Helen Arthur actually "stole" one—and the applause at the close of the show was so unsustained that the curtain was lifted only three times, and then only to show the entire company, no principals taking bows.

The trouble was, (1) the orchestra would not follow the director and (2) they had to throw out a whole choreographic number—a Ballet a la Degas—at the last moment, because Monna Montes, the prima ballerina, had sprained her ankle in rehearsal.

I have never seen a director work so hard as did Pierre de Reeder, and to so little purpose.

* * *

Comedy Routine Sad

A feature I found almost unbearable Saturday night was the very thing a large part of the audience enjoyed the most. That was the old-time burlesque routine of Doug Leavitt and Harry K. Morton. I have never seen anything amusing in that routine since I first saw it many, many years ago, and it grows more repulsive to me as time goes by. It's the routine in which one comedian, by emitting spluttering sibilants, bespatters the other with saliva, and the other repays him in kind, to the accompaniment of much eye-wiping and grimaces of resentment . . . But many in the audience greeted these disgusting antics as though they had never seen anything so funny in their lives. And the same easily tickled playgoers found a jig-walk of Mr. Morton's delightful. I did not.

Alexander Gray was made up to look like the familiar portraits of Franz Schubert and he played the part with convincing humility, tenderness and forebearance. His singing voice also is pleasant. The finest male voice in the cast is that of Roy Barnes, as Vogel, a voice heard only with four others or with the ensemble, but truly extraordinary and beautiful in tone. It is too bad that Mr. Barnes has ears like Clark Gable and there the resemblance ends—precipitously; for if he were more romantic looking, what an operetta star he would make! (Mr. Barnes, by the way, wears the same brown coat he wore in The Student Prince, and it apparently hasn't been pressed since The Student Prince opened three months ago).

Except for the costuming of Miss Scully, Adelaide Hishop and Loraine Manners (Miss Scully's changes each become her like something exquisite out of a fete galante by Boucher), the inspirations of Stage Costumes, Inc., were, like Mr. Romberg's, a shade short of thrilling, and the settings by Watson Barratt are strictly functional in design.

"The Snark Was A Boojum"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
September 2, 1943

'The Snark Was a Boojum' Tries Too Hard to Be Mad As a Hatter

By JOHN CHAPMAN

THERE is a conceit among some lovers of the nonsense verse of Lewis Carroll—a conceit that, if they go around quoting the stuff out loud it proves that they, themselves are just lousy with whimsy too.

It has been my experience that most of these quoters-aloud are stuffy bores. "The Snark Was a Boojum," which opened last night at the 48th St. Theatre, is a stuffy bore.

It is Owen Davis' 278th play. This notable hard-headed and very fine gentleman had better rest, for the moment, on the record of the 277 others. He can cop a plea, for he did not think this one up all by himself. He merely adapted it from a novel written by a lady who signed the name of her husband, Richard Shattuck, to it. She is a quoter of the nonsense verse of Lewis Carroll.

One of Those Families

The quote from which the title is taken goes: "'For although common Snarks do no manner of harm, yet, I feel it my duty to say, some are Boojums.' The Bellman broke off in alarm, for the Baker fainted away." It has nothing to do with what goes on at the 48th St., except that some dutiful actors faint away once in a while.

What does go on is an attempt to be whimsical. One is introduced to a mad family. All the women are pregnant, because Uncle Mortimer's will left all the money to the first Shilly child born in the old Shilly house. If this sounds shilly it is the authors' fault, for I'm cold shober after three acts.

Childbirth Made Easy

The setting is New England and it is snowing and a maniac is supposed to be loose in the countryside. Chains clank, people run up and down and in and out, and one of the Shilly ladies bears her first child in about ten easy minutes with the help of a veterinarian. There is a love story of sorts. The heroine quotes Lewis Carroll.

The participants in this lark include many players, such as Catherine Willard, Frank Lovejoy, Ben Lackland and Florence MacMichael, who work intelligently enough with what they've got. A chap named Mervyn Nelson, from the night clubs, does an amusing swish interior decorator, and I think his sketch was interpolated.

Perhaps Owen Davis only does it to annoy because he knows it teases.

"The Snark Was A Boojum"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
September 2, 1943

Lots of Goings-On That Need Going Over

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IF (in case you've forgotten your Lewis Carroll) the title of last night's offering confuses you, don't count on anything in the play itself to set you straight. Owen Davis has plunked down a lot of characters in a screwy free-for-all and then pulled the covers over his head and let them work things out as best they can. They wobble around—drunk, drugged and sober—for what seems an eternity without once stumbling on anything that is even remotely funny. Early September is open season for this kind of mishap, and there's no reason to get much worked up over it.

The Snark proceeds out of one of those eccentric wills that has supplied the fodder for at least a thousand farces; in this case the money is to go to the first relative who can produce a baby. Hence the stage is festooned with expectant mothers, while just for good measure a vet is helping to confer motherhood on a dog in the cellar. Naturally there are a good many jokes on the subject. Also featured in the play are a homicidal maniac, a presumable murder, a great deal of running up and down stairs, even more running in and out of doors, and a young lady who, when all else fails, spouts portions of *The Hunting of the Snark* as well as *Romeo and Juliet, Othello* and the *Book of Ruth*. But even the Bard and the Bible prove of no avail.

The production, taking its cue from the script, bumbles along with frenzied aimlessness. When even so amusing a character actress as Florence MacMichael can hardly raise the ghost of a laugh, one can hardly expect much of her less talented companions.

'THE SNARK WAS A BOOJUM'

Play in three acts by Owen Davis, based on a novel by Richard Shattuck; staged by Alexander Kirkland; setting designed by Frederick Fox; produced by Alex Yokel, in association with Jay Faggen, at the Forty-eighth Street Theater, Wednesday evening, September 1, 1943. The cast:

Rodney Shilly	Frank Lovejoy
Mrs. Wilson Wilson	Catherine Willard
Elwood	Dickie Van Patten
Millie Smith	Joan Banks
Sidney	Ben Lackland
Sandy Gate	Jane Huszagh
Martin	Mervyn Nelson
Maybelle	Florence MacMichael
Henry	Fleming Ward
Vivian	Phyllis Adams
Ward McKay	Francis Compton
Aunt Adeline	Ann Dere
Daybreak	Harold Waldrige
Doctor Mortice	Frank Wilcox
Rosie	Grania O'Malley

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
September 2, 1943

Not Carroll's Snark

By HOWARD BARNES

IF LEWIS CARROLL is rolling briskly in his grave, it is small wonder. "The Snark Was a Boojum," which has stuttered into the Forty-eighth Street Theater, borrows its title from him and then adds insult to injury by interpolating passages of his great nonsense in a dreary little comic melodrama. Even Carroll starts to sound labored before this Owen Davis whimsy flounders into a final curtain. The newest production of the new season does not find it looking up.

The piece is based on a novel by Richard Shattuck, which this reviewer never read and certainly never will now. It is in conventional three-act form, but there is so little wit or theatrical excitement about its unfolding that one might be pardoned for not recognizing it as a stage entertainment. For most of the time it is concerned with elaborately dull gags about a trio of objectionable and pregnant young women entered in a baby derby. When this sort of thing gets badly out of hand, there are moments of melodramatic bustling, even to clanking chains and disappearing corpses.

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Probably the best index to the offering's worth is the fact that the melodrama is just as bad as the comedy. I wouldn't have believed that a supposed maniac on the loose could be made a matter for sheer yawning in the theater. It is in "The Snark Was a Boojum." Coming on top of the deadly quips about childbirth and a singularly unengaging romance, it keeps the production consistently dreary. Perhaps I should mention that the plot involves several insolvent cousins and their women-folk in a fight for a rich eccentric's fortune. The veteran Mr. Davis does not even make that simple theme lucid or interesting.

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The players are in there punching most of the time, but theirs is a thankless task. Catherine Willard has crisp authority as a matronly widow who is rather astounded by the breeding contest that is supposed to settle a legacy. Frank Lovejoy and Jane Huszagh make vagrant attempts at fantasy and love making, and Mervyn Nelson has a bit of rather effective clowning which has nothing at all to do with the play. Alexander Kirkland's staging leaves the script as disorderly and dull as it must have been on paper. "The Snark Was a Boojum" has connotations of fun and nonsense in its title, but it is no fun watching it.

NEW YORK TIMES
September 2, 1943

'The Snark Was a Boojum,' Somewhat Removed from Carroll, Opens on B'way

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THE catalogue of Owen Davis plays lists them by the hundreds: melodramas, prize winners, comedies, adaptations, farces. To say that "The Snark Was a Boojum" does not rank among the best of them is to draw as soft a veil as possible over the evening Alex Yokel has provided for the Forty-eighth Street Theatre. For in making his adaptation of the Richard Shattuck novel, Mr. Davis has written pieces of several types of play, and neither he nor anyone else has bothered to pull them all together. Possibly it was impossible; the result, in any case, carried the melancholy which goes with comedy that does not come off.

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The title is from Lewis Carroll, and the play is of the nonsense type much better done in "Three Men on a Horse" and others. In a New England house are three women expecting babies, the first to arrive receiving the family legacy. Into the house comes a woman who carries her husband's ashes in a briefcase, plus a niece who is the love interest, of course. The husbands of the three women are a drunk, an effeminate decorator and a greeting-card poet (cf. "Three Men on a Horse," also produced by Mr. Yokel). Someone tries to break up the will, chains rattle, a homicidal maniac is reported outside and there are further attempts at melodrama. The comedy remains not funny; the melodrama is not exciting.

Any cast engaging itself with the fortunes of "The Snark Was a Boojum" would be in for trouble at the start, and the one assembled by Mr. Yokel can only do its best. Mervyn Nelson gives at least a touch of something as the effeminate husband; Ann Dere is the sinister Aunt Adeline, who probably would rank as a menace were the whole thing melodrama; Jane Huszagh is attractive as the young girl who wanders into what certainly is a strange household. It is Miss Huszagh who recites a bit of "The Hunting of the Snark," proving once again that is a fine poem but proving further by contrast "The Snark Was a Boojum" could have done with a bit more Carroll.

Alexander Kirkland directed so that all eight doors in one of Frederick Fox's fine sets are in constant use.

NEW YORK SUN
September 2, 1943

Owen Davis's New Play, 'The Snark Was a Boojum,' Is Somewhat Exhausting

By WARD MOREHOUSE

OWEN DAVIS, the man who wrote "Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model" and 277 other plays, gave New York his latest last evening via Alex Yokel's production at the Forty-eighth Street theater. This new one, entitled "The Snark Was a Boojum," is strange, silly and tiresome, and for it I fear the worst.

Now, Mr. Davis is a conscientious craftsman who has given long and frequently distinguished service to the drama. He wrote a good play in "The Family Cupboard" and even better ones in such pieces as "The Detour" and "Icebound" (Pulitzer prize). But in his new comedy he is off his form. He and his producer, Mr. Yokel, and their director, Alexander Kirkland, have put in many long, hard hours since the Boston premiere but the Broadway opening was not a happy one.

The title is out of Lewis Carroll and the play itself is out of a book—and out of several other plays, it seemed from time to time, including a couple of Mr. Davis's. And in the jumble unfolded last night at the Forty-eighth, I had the feeling that characters had strayed in from "Seven Keys to Baldpate" and "You Can't Take It With You." And, possibly, from "The Cat and the Canary" and "Baby Mine."

Mr. Davis's locale is his own native New England and the old Shilly homestead has the bleakness of Baldpate Inn, but without its fun. Above the mantelpiece scowls old Uncle Mortimer Shilly, whose will provides that his fortune go to that member of the family being the first to give birth to a baby beneath the manor roof. So, in the course of at least two exhausting acts, expectant mothers are wheeled in and out; there is a maniac at large; there is a veterinarian who doubles as a midwife; there are interminable scenes between the juvenile and the ingenue; the codicil to the will is found, and the commotion is rather over-powering.

The book on which this play is based must have struck both Mr. Davis and Alex Yokel as being pretty wacky stuff, material that could be transferred successfully to the stage. The first act goes along well enough and its rather funny finish stirred my hopes, but thereafter "The Snark Was a Boojum" was aimless and wearisome.

Several first-rate players are lost in their present roles. I thought Frank Wilcox, always to be remembered from "You Can't Take It With You," fared best as the veterinarian. The cast includes such usually competent people as Francis Compton, Fleming Ward and Florence MacMichael. Harold Waldrige, once the late Winchell Smith's favorite actor, has a small role. Frank Lovejoy was pleasant enough as the sanest of those Shillys. Jane Huszagh has possibilities in a better ingenue part.

The new theatrical season is still floundering. With all respect to the Messrs. Davis & Yokel, the snark may be a boojum—but it is not a play.